DOROTHY DALE'S ENGAGEMENT

MARGARET PENROSE

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"NO, DADDY," SHE SAID, "I—I THINK I—I AM IN LOVE."

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BY

MARGARET PENROSE

AUTHOR OF "DOROTHY DALE: A GIRL OF TO-DAY," "DOROTHY DALE AT GLENWOOD SCHOOL," "DOROTHY DALE IN THE CITY," "THE MOTOR GIRLS SERIES," ETC.

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DOROTHY DALE'S ENGAGEMENT

CHAPTER I

"ALONE IN A GREAT CITY"

"Now, Tavia!"

"Now, Dorothy!" mocked Octavia Travers, making a little face as she did so; but then, Tavia Travers could afford to "make faces," possessing as she did such a naturally pretty one.

"We must decide immediately," her chum, Dorothy Dale, said decidedly, "whether to continue in the train under the river and so to the main station, or to change for the Hudson tube. You know, we can walk from the tube station at Twenty-third Street to the hotel Aunt Winnie always patronizes."

"With these heavy bags, Doro?"

"Only a block and a half, my dear Tavia. You are a strong, healthy girl."

"But I do so like to have people do things for me," sighed Tavia, clasping her hands. "And taxicabs are *so* nice."

"And expensive," rejoined Dorothy.

"Of course. That is what helps to make them nice," declared Tavia. "Doro, I just love to throw away money!"

"You only think you do, my dear," her chum said placidly. "Once you had thrown some of your own money away—some of that your father sent you to spend for your fall and winter outfit—you would sing a different tune."

"I don't believe I would—not if by throwing it away I really made a splurge, Doro," sighed Tavia. "I *love* money."

"You mean, you love what money enables us to have."

"Yep," returned the slangy Tavia. "And taxi-cab rides eat up money horribly. We found that out, Doro, when we were in New York before, that time—before we graduated from dear old Glenwood School."

"But *this* isn't getting us anywhere. To return——"

"'*Revenons à nos moutons!*' Sure! I know," gabbled Tavia. "Let us return to our mutton. He, he! Have I forgotten my French?"

"I really think you have," laughed Dorothy Dale. "Most of it. And almost everything else you learned at dear old Glenwood, Tavia. But, quick! Decide, my dear. How shall we enter New York City? We are approaching the Manhattan Transfer."

"Mercy! So quick?"

"Yes. Just like that."

"I tell you," whispered Tavia, suddenly becoming confidential, her sparkling eyes darting a glance ahead. "Let's leave it to that nice man."

"Who? What man do you mean, Tavia?" demanded Dorothy, her face at once serious. "Do try to behave."

"Am behaving," declared Tavia, nodding. "But I'm a good sport. Let's leave it to him."

"Whom do you mean?"

"You know. That nice, Western looking young man who opened the window for us that time. He is sitting in that chair just yonder. Don't you see?" and she indicated a pair of broad shoulders in a gray coat, above which was revealed a well-shaped head with a thatch of black hair.

"Do consider!" begged Dorothy, catching Tavia's hand as though she feared her chum was about to get up to speak to this stranger. "This is a public car. We are observed."

"Little silly!" said Tavia, smiling upon her chum tenderly. "You don't suppose I would do anything so crude—or rude—as to speak to the gentleman? 'Fie! fie! fie for shame! Turn your back and tell his name!' And you don't know it, you know you don't, Doro."

Dorothy broke into smiles again and shook her head; her own eyes, too, dancing roguishly.

"I only know his initials," she said.

"What?" gasped Tavia Travers in something more than mock horror.

"Yes. They are 'G. K.' I saw them on his bag. Couldn't help it," explained Dorothy, now laughing outright. "But decide, dear! Shall we change at Manhattan Transfer?"

"If *he* does—there!" chuckled Tavia. "We'll get out if the nice Western cowboy person does. Oh! he's a whole lot nicer looking than Lance Peterby."

"Dear me, Tavia! Haven't you forgotten Lance yet?"

"Never!" vowed Tavia, tragically. "Not till the day of my death—and then some, as Lance would himself say."

"You are incorrigible," sighed Dorothy. Then: "He's going to get out, Tavia!"

"Oh! oh! oh!" crowed her chum, under her breath. "You were looking."

"Goodness me!" returned Dorothy, in some exasperation. "Who could miss that hat?"

The young man in question had put on his broad-brimmed gray hat. He was just the style of man that such a hat became.

The young man lifted down the heavy suitcase from the rack—the one on which Dorothy had seen the big, black letters, "G. K." He had a second suitcase of the same description under his

feet. He set both out into the aisle, threw his folded light overcoat over his arm, and prepared to make for the front door of the car as the train began to slow down.

"Come on, now!" cried Tavia, suddenly in a great hurry.

But Dorothy had to put on her coat, and to make sure that she looked just right in the mirror beside her chair. All Tavia had to do was to toss her summer fur about her neck and grab up her traveling bag.

"We'll be left!" she cried. "The train doesn't stop here long."

"You run, then, and tell them to wait," Dorothy said calmly.

They were, however, the last to leave the car—the last to leave the train, in fact—at the elevated platform which gives a broad view of the New Jersey meadows.

"My goodness me!" gasped Tavia, as the brakeman helped them to the platform, and waved his hand for departure. "My goodness me! We're clear at this end of this awful platform, and the tube train stops—and of course starts—at the far end. A mile to walk with these bags and not a redcap in sight. Oh, yes! there's one," she added faintly.

"Redcap?" queried Dorothy. "Oh! you mean a porter."

"Yes," Tavia said. "Of course you would be slow. Everybody's got a porter but us."

Dorothy laughed mellowly. "Who's fault do you intimate it is?" she asked. "We might have been the first out of the car."

"*He's* got one," whispered Tavia.

Oddly enough her chum did not ask "Who?" this time. She, too, was looking at the back of the well-set-up young man whose initials seemed to be G. K. He stood confronting an importunate porter, whose smiling face was visible to the girls as he said:

"Why, Boss, yo' can't possibly kerry dem two big bags f'om dis end ob de platfo'm to de odder."

The porter held out both hands for the big suitcases carried by the Western looking young man, who really appeared to be physically much better able to carry his baggage than the negro.

"I don't suppose two-bits has anything to do with your desire to tote my bag?" suggested the white man, and the listening girls knew he must be smiling broadly.

"Why, Boss, *yo'* can't earn two-bits carryin' bags yere; but *I* kin," and the negro chuckled delightedly as he gained possession of the bags. "Come right along, Boss."

As the porter set off, the young man turned and saw Dorothy Dale and Tavia Travers behind him. Besides themselves, indeed, this end of the

long cement platform was clear. Other passengers from the in-bound train had either gone forward or descended into the tunnel under the tracks to reach the north-side platform. The only porter in sight was the man who had taken G. K.'s bags.

The weight of the shiny black bags the girls carried was obvious. Indeed, perhaps Tavia sagged perceptibly on that side—and intentionally; and, of course, her hazel eyes said "Please!" just as plain as eyes ever spoke before.

Off came the broad-brimmed hat just for an instant. Then he held out both hands.

"Let me help you, ladies," he said, with the pleasantest of smiles. "Seeing that I have obtained the services of the only Jasper in sight, you'd better let me play porter. Going to take this tube train, ladies?"

"Yes, indeed!" cried Tavia, twinkling with smiles at once, and first to give him a bag.

Dorothy might have hesitated, but the young man was insistent and quick. He seized both bags as a matter of course, and Dorothy Dale could not pull hers away from him.

"You must let us pay your porter, then," she said, in her quietly pleasant way.

"Bless you! we won't fight over that," chuckled the young man.

He was agreeably talkative, with that whole-

some, free, yet chivalrous manner which the girls, especially the thoughtful Dorothy, had noticed as particular attributes of the men they had met during their memorable trip to the West, some months before.

She noticed, too, that his attentions to Tavia and herself were nicely balanced. Of course, Tavia, as she always did, began to run on in her light-hearted and irresponsible way; but though the young man listened to her with a quiet smile, he spoke directly to Dorothy quite as often as he did to the flyaway girl. He did not seek to take advantage of Tavia's exuberant good spirits as so many strangers might have done.

Tavia's flirtatious ways were a sore trial to her more sober chum; but this young man seemed to understand Tavia at once.

"Of course, you're from the West?" Tavia finished one "rattlety-bang" series of remarks with this direct question.

"Of course I am. Right from the desert—Desert City, in fact," he said, with a quiet smile.

"Oh!" gasped Tavia, turning her big eyes on her chum. "Did you hear that, Doro? Desert City!"

For the girls, during their visit to the West had, as Tavia often claimed in true Western slang, helped "put Desert City on the map."

Dorothy, however, did not propose to let this

conversation with a strange man become at all personal. She ignored her chum's observation and, as the city-bound tube train came sliding in beside the platform, she reached for her own bag and insisted upon taking it from the Westerner's hand.

"Thank you so much," she said, with just the right degree of firmness as well as of gratitude.

Perforce he had to give up the bag, and Tavia's, too, for there was the red-capped, smiling negro expectant of the "two-bits."

"You are *so* kind," breathed Tavia, with one of her wonderful "man-killing" glances at the considerate G. K., as Dorothy's cousin, Nat White, would have termed her expression of countenance.

G. K. was polite and not brusk; but he was not flirtatious. Dorothy entered the Hudson tube train with a feeling of considerable satisfaction. G. K. did not even enter the car by the same door as themselves nor did he take the empty seat opposite the girls, as he might have done.

"There! he is one young man who will not flirt with you, Tavia," she said, admonishingly.

"Pooh! I didn't half try," declared her chum, lightly.

"My dear! you would be tempted, I believe, to flirt with a blind man!"

"Oh, Doro! Never!" Then she dimpled sud-

denly, glancing out of the window as the train swept on. "*There's* a man I didn't try to flirt with."

"Where?" laughed Dorothy.

"Otuside there beside the tracks," for they had not yet reached the Summit Avenue Station, and it is beyond that spot that the trains dive into the tunnel.

"We passed him too quickly then," said Dorothy. "Lucky man!"

The next moment—or so it seemed—Tavia began on another tack:

"To think! In fifteen minutes, Doro my dear, we shall be 'Alone in a Great City.' "

"How alone?" drawled her friend. "Do you suppose New York has suddenly been depopulated?"

"But we shall be alone, Doro. What more lonesome than a crowd in which you know nobody?"

"How very thoughtful you have become of a sudden. I hope you will keep your hand on your purse, dear. There will be some people left in the great city—and perhaps one may be a pickpocket."

The electric lights were flashed on, and the train soon dived into the great tunnel, "like a rabbit into his burrow," Tavia said. They had to disembark at Grove Street to change for an up-

town train. The tall young Westerner did likewise, but he did not accost them.

The Sixth Avenue train soon whisked the girls to their destination, and they got out at Twenty-third Street. As they climbed the steps to the street level, Tavia suddenly uttered a surprised cry.

"Look, will you, Doro?" she said. "Right ahead!"

"G. K.!" exclaimed her friend, for there was the young man mounting the stairs, lugging his two heavy suitcases.

"Suppose he goes to the very same hotel?" giggled Tavia.

"Well—maybe that will be nice," Dorothy said composedly. "He looks nice enough for us to get acquainted with him—in some perfectly proper way, of course."

"Whew, Doro!" breathed Tavia, her eyes opening wide again. "You're coming on, my dear."

"I am speaking sensibly. If he is a nice young man and perfectly respectable, why shouldn't he find some means of meeting us—if he wants to—and we are all at the same hotel?"

"But——"

"I don't believe in flirting," said Dorothy Dale, calmly, yet with a twinkle in her eyes. "But I certainly would not fly in the face of Providence—as Miss Higley, our old teacher at Glenwood,

would say—and refuse to meet G. K. He looks like a really nice young man."

"Doro!" gasped Tavia. "You amaze me! I shall next expect to see the heavens fall!"

"Don't be ridiculous," said her friend, as they reached the exit of the tube station and stepped out upon the sidewalk.

There was the Westerner already dickering with a boy to carry his bags.

"*He* likes to throw money away, too!" whispered Tavia. "I suppose we must be economical and carry ours."

"As there seems to be no other boy in sight—yes," laughed her friend.

"That young man gets the best of us every time," complained Tavia under her breath.

"He is typically Western," said Dorothy. "He is prompt."

But then, the boy starting off with the heavy bags in a little box-wagon he drew, the young man whose initials were G. K., turned with a smile to the two girls.

"Ladies," he said, lifting his hat again, "at the risk of being considered impertinent, I wish to ask you if you are going my way? If so I will help you with your bags, having again cinched what seems to be the only baggage transportation facilities at this station."

For once Tavia was really speechless. It was

Dorothy who quite coolly asked the young man:

"Which is your direction?"

"To the Fanuel," he said.

"That is where we are going," Dorothy admitted, giving him her bag again without question.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tavia, "getting into the picture with a bounce," as she would have expressed it. "Aren't you the *handiest* young man!"

"Thank you," he replied, laughing. "That is a reputation to make one proud. I never was in this man's town before, but I was recommended to the Fanuel by my boss."

"Oh!" Tavia hastened to take the lead in the conversation. "We've been here before—Doro and I. And we always stop at the Fanuel."

"Now, I look on that as a streak of pure luck," he returned. He looked at Dorothy, however, not at Tavia.

The boy with the wagon went on ahead and the three voyagers followed, laughing and chatting, G. K. swinging the girls' bags as though they were light instead of heavy.

"I want awfully to know his name," whispered Tavia, when they came to the hotel entrance and the young man handed over their bags again and went to the curb to get his own suitcases from the boy.

"Let's," added Tavia, "go to the clerk's desk and ask for the rooms your Aunt Winnie wrote

about. Then I'll get a chance to see what he writes on the book."

"Nonsense, Tavia!" exclaimed Dorothy. "We'll do nothing of the kind. We must go to the ladies' parlor and send a boy to the clerk, or the manager, with our cards. This is a family hotel, I know; but the lobby and the office are most likely full of men at this time in the day."

"Oh, dear! Come on, then, Miss Particular," groaned Tavia. "And we didn't even bid him good-bye at parting."

"What did you want to do?" laughed Dorothy. "Weep on his shoulder and give him some trinket, for instance, as a souvenir?"

"Dorothy Dale!" exclaimed her friend. "I believe you have something up your sleeve. You seem just *sure* of seeing this nice cowboy person again."

"All men from the West do not punch cattle for a living. And it would not be the strangest thing in the world if we should meet G. K. again, as he is stopping at this hotel."

However, the girls saw nothing more of the smiling and agreeable Westerner that day. Dorothy Dale's aunt had secured by mail two rooms and a bath for her niece and Tavia. The girls only appeared at dinner, and retired early. Even Tavia's bright eyes could not spy out G. K. while they were at dinner.

Besides, the girls had many other things to think about, and Tavia's mind could not linger entirely upon even as nice a young man as G. K. appeared to be.

This was their first visit to New York alone, as the more lively girl indicated. Aunt Winnie White had sprained her ankle and could not come to the city for the usual fall shopping. Dorothy was, for the first time, to choose her own fall and winter outfit. Tavia had come on from Dalton, with the money her father had been able to give her for a similar purpose, and the friends were to shop together.

They left the hotel early the next morning and arrived at the first huge department store on their list almost as soon as the store was opened, at nine o'clock.

An hour later they were in the silk department, pricing goods and "just looking" as Tavia said. In her usual thoughtless and incautious way, Tavia dropped her handbag upon the counter while she used both hands to examine a particular piece of goods, calling Dorothy's attention to it, too.

"No, dear; I do not think it is good enough, either for the money or for your purpose," Dorothy said. "The color *is* lovely; but don't be guided wholly by that."

"No. I suppose you are right," sighed Tavia. She shook her head at the clerk and prepared

to follow her friend, who had already left the counter. Hastily picking up what she supposed to be her bag, Tavia ran two or three steps to catch up with Dorothy. As she did so a feminine shriek behind her startled everybody within hearing.

"That girl—she's got my bag! Stop her!"

"Oh! what is it?" gasped Dorothy, turning.

"Somebody's stolen something," stammered Tavia, turning around too.

Then she looked at the bag in her hand. Instead of her own seal-leather one, it was a much more expensive bag, gold mounted and plethoric.

"There she is! She's got it in her hand!"

A woman dressed in the most extreme fashion and most expensively, darted down the aisle upon the two girls. She pointed a quivering, accusing finger directly at poor Tavia.

CHAPTER II

G. K. TO THE RESCUE

DOROTHY DALE and her friend Tavia Travers had often experienced very serious adventures, but the shock of this incident perhaps was as great and as thrilling as anything that had heretofore happened to them.

The series of eleven previous stories about Dorothy, Tavia, and their friends began with "Dorothy Dale: A Girl of To-day," some years before the date of this present narrative. At that time Dorothy was living with her father, Major Frank Dale, a Civil War veteran, who owned and edited the *Bugle*, a newspaper published in Dalton, a small town in New York State.

Then Major Dale's livelihood and that of the family, consisting of Dorothy and her small brothers, Joe and Roger, depended upon the success of the *Bugle*. Taken seriously ill in the midst of a lively campaign for temperance and for a general reform government in Dalton, it looked as though the major would lose his paper and the better element in the town lose their fight for prohibition; but Dorothy Dale, confident that she could do it,

got out the *Bugle* and did much, young girl though she was, to save the day. In this she was helped by Tavia Travers, a girl brought up entirely differently from Dorothy, and who possessed exactly the opposite characteristics to serve as a foil for Dorothy's own good sense and practical nature.

Major Dale was unexpectedly blessed with a considerable legacy which enabled him to sell the *Bugle* and take his children to The Cedars, at North Birchland, to live with his widowed sister and her two boys, Ned and Nat White, who were both older than their cousin Dorothy. In "Dorothy Dale at Glenwood School," is related these changes for the better in the fortunes of the Dale family, and as well there is narrated the beginning of a series of adventures at school and during vacation times, in which Dorothy and Tavia are the central characters.

Subsequent books are entitled respectively: "Dorothy Dale's Great Secret," "Dorothy Dale and Her Chums," "Dorothy Dale's Queer Holidays," "Dorothy Dale's Camping Days," "Dorothy Dale's School Rivals," "Dorothy Dale in the City," and "Dorothy Dale's Promise," in which story the two friends graduate from Glenwood and return to their homes feeling—and looking, of course—like real, grown-up young ladies. Nevertheless, they are not then through with adventures, surprising happenings, and much fun.

About the time the girls graduated from school an old friend of Major Dale, Colonel Hardin, passed away, leaving his large estate in the West partly to the major and partly to be administered for the local public good. Cattle raising was not so generally followed as formerly in that section and dry farming was being tried.

Colonel Hardin had foreseen that nothing but a system of irrigation would save the poor farmers from ruin and on his land was the fountain of supply that should water the whole territory about Desert City and make it "blossom as the rose." There were mining interests, however, selfishly determined to obtain the water rights on the Hardin Estate and that by hook or by crook.

Major Dale's health was not at this time good enough for him to look into these matters actively or to administer his dead friend's estate. Therefore, it is told in "Dorothy Dale in the West," how Aunt Winnie White, Dorothy's two cousins, Ned and Nat, and herself with Tavia, go far from North Birchland and mingle with the miners, and other Western characters to be found on and about the Hardin property, including a cowboy named Lance Petterby, who shows unmistakable signs of being devoted to Tavia. Indeed, after the party return to the East, Lance writes to Tavia and the latter's apparent predilection for the cowboy somewhat troubles Dorothy.

However, after their return to the East the chums went for a long visit to the home of a school friend, Jennie Hapgood, in Pennsylvania; and there Tavia seemed to have secured other—and less dangerous—interests. In "Dorothy Dale's Strange Discovery," the narrative immediately preceding this present tale, Dorothy displays her characteristic kindliness and acute reasoning powers in solving a problem that brings to Jennie Hapgood's father the very best of good fortune.

Naturally, the Hapgoods are devoted to Dorothy. Besides, Ned and Nat, her cousins, have visited Sunnyside and are vastly interested in Jennie. The girl chums now in New York City on this shopping tour, expect on returning to North Birchland to find Jennie Hapgood there for a promised visit.

At the moment, however, that we find Dorothy and Tavia at the beginning of this chapter, neither girl is thinking much about Jennie Hapgood and her expected visit, or of anything else of minor importance.

The flashily dressed woman who had run after Tavia down the aisle, again screamed her accusation at the amazed and troubled girl:

"That's my bag! It's cram full of money, too."

There was no great crowd in the store, for New York ladies do not as a rule shop much before

luncheon. Nevertheless, besides salespeople, there were plenty to hear the woman's unkind accusation and enough curious shoppers to ring in immediately the two troubled girls and the angry woman.

"Give me it!" exclaimed the latter, and snatched the bag out of Tavia's hand. As this was done the catch slipped in some way and the handbag burst open.

It was "cram full" of money. Bills of large denomination were rolled carelessly into a ball, with a handkerchief, a purse for change, several keys, and a vanity box. Some of these things tumbled out upon the floor and a young boy stooped and recovered them for her.

"You're a bad, bad girl!" declared the angry woman. "I hope they send you to jail."

"Why—why, I didn't know it was yours," murmured Tavia, quite upset.

"Oh! you thought somebody had forgotten it and you could get away with it," declared the other, coarsely enough.

"I beg your pardon, Madam," Dorothy Dale here interposed. "It was a mistake on my friend's part. And *you* are making another mistake, and a serious one."

She spoke in her most dignified tone, and although Dorothy was barely in her twentieth year she had the manner and stability of one much

older. She realized that poor Tavia was in danger of "going all to pieces" if the strain continued. And, too, her own anger at the woman's harsh accusation naturally put the girl on her mettle.

"Who are *you,* I'd like to know?" snapped the woman.

"I am her friend," said Dorothy Dale, quite composedly, "and I know her to be incapable of taking your bag save by chance. She laid her own down on the counter and took up yours——"

"And where *is* mine?" suddenly wailed Tavia, on the verge of an hysterical outbreak. "My bag! My money——"

"Hush!" whispered Dorothy in her friend's pretty ear. "Don't become a second harridan—like this creature."

The woman had led the way back to the silk counter. Tavia began to claw wildly among the broken bolts of silk that the clerk had not yet been able to return to the shelves. But she stopped at Dorothy's command, and stood, pale and trembling.

A floorwalked hastened forward. He evidently knew the noisy woman as a good customer of the store.

"Mrs. Halbridge! What is the matter? Nothing serious, I hope?"

"It would have been serious all right," said the customer, in her high-pitched voice, "if I

hadn't just seen that girl by luck. Yes, by luck! There she was making for the door with this bag of mine—and there's several hundred dollars in it, I'd have you know."

"I beg of you, Mrs. Halbridge," said the floorwalker in a low tone, "for the sake of the store to make no trouble about it here. If you insist we will take the girl up to the superintendent's office——"

Here Dorothy, her anger rising interrupted:

"You would better not. Mrs. Winthrop White, of North Birchland, is a charge customer of your store, and is probably just as well known to the heads of the firm as this—this person," and she cast what Tavia—in another mood— would have called a "scathing glance" at Mrs. Halbridge.

"I am Mrs. White's niece and this is my particular friend. We are here alone on a shopping tour; but if our word is not quite as good as that of this—this person, we certainly shall buy elsewhere."

Tavia, obsessed with a single idea, murmured again:

"But I haven't got my bag! Somebody's taken my bag! And all my money——"

The floorwalker was glancing about, hoping for some avenue of escape from the unfortunate predicament, when a very tall, white-haired and soldierly looking man appeared in the aisle.

"Mr. Schuman!" gasped the floorwalker.

The man was one of the chief proprietors of the big store. He scowled slightly at the floorwalker when he saw the excited crowd, and then raised his eyebrows questioningly.

"This is not the place for any lengthy discussion, Mr. Mink," said Mr. Schuman, with just the proper touch of admonition in his tone.

"I know! I know, Mr. Schuman!" said the floorwalker. "But this difficulty—it came so suddenly—Mrs. Halbridge, here, makes the complaint," he finally blurted out, in an attempt to shoulder off some of the responsibility for the unfortunate situation.

"Mrs. Halbridge?" The old gentleman bowed in a most courtly style. "One of our customers, I presume, Mr. Mink?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Mr. Schuman," the floorwalker hastened to say. "One of our *very* good customers. And I am so sorry that anything should have happened——"

"But what has happened?" asked Mr. Schuman, sharply.

"She—she accuses this—it's all a mistake, I'm sure—this young lady of taking her bag," stuttered Mr. Mink, pointing to Tavia.

"She ought to be arrested," muttered the excited Mrs. Halbridge.

"What? But this is a matter for the superin-

tendent's office, Mr. Mink," returned Mr. Schuman.

"Oh!" stammered the floorwalker. "The bag is returned."

"And now," put in Dorothy Dale, haughtily, and looking straight and unflinchingly into the keen eyes of Mr. Schuman, "my friend wishes to know what has become of *her* bag?"

Mr. Schuman looked at the two girls with momentary hesitation.

There was something compelling in the ladylike look and behaviour of these two girls—and especially in Dorothy's speech. At the moment, too, a hand was laid tentatively upon Mr. Schuman's arm.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the full, resonant voice that Dorothy had noted the day before. "I know the young ladies—Miss Dale and Miss Travers, respectively, Mr. Schuman."

"Oh, Mr. Knapp—thank you!" said the old gentleman, turning to the tall young Westerner with whom he had been walking through the store at the moment he had spied the crowd. "You are a discourager of embarrassment."

"Oh! blessed 'G. K.'!" whispered Tavia, weakly clinging to Dorothy's arm.

CHAPTER III

TAVIA IN THE SHADE

MRS. HALBRIDGE was slyly slipping through the crowd. She had suddenly lost all interest in the punishment of the girl she had accused of stealing her bag and her money.

There was something so stern about Mr. Schuman that it was not strange that the excitable woman should fear further discussion of the matter. The old gentleman turned at once to Dorothy Dale and Tavia Travers.

"This is an unfortunate and regrettable incident, young ladies," he said suavely. " I assure you that such things as this seldom occur under our roof."

"I am confident it is a single occurrence," Dorothy said, with conviction, "or my aunt, Mrs. Winthrop White, of North Birchland, would not have traded with you for so many years."

"One of our charge customers, Mr. Schuman," whispered Mr. Mink, deciding it was quite time now to come to the assistance of the girls.

"Regrettable! Regrettable!" repeated the old gentleman.

Here Tavia again entered her wailing protest:

"I did not mean to take her bag from the counter. But somebody has taken my bag."

"Oh, Tavia!" exclaimed her friend, now startled into noticing what Tavia really said about it.

"It's gone!" wailed Tavia. "And all the money father sent me. Oh, dear, Doro Dale! I guess I *have* thrown my money away, and, as you prophesied, it isn't as much fun as I thought it might be."

"My dear young lady," hastily inquired Mr. Schuman, "have you really lost your purse?"

"My bag," sobbed Tavia. "I laid it down while I examined some silk. That clerk saw me," she added, pointing to the man behind the counter.

"It is true, Mr. Schuman," the silk clerk admitted, blushing painfully. "But, of course, I did not notice what became of the lady's bag."

"Nor did I see the other bag until I found it in my hand," Tavia cried.

The crowd was dissipated by this time, and all spoke in low voices. Outside the counter was a cash-girl, a big-eyed and big-eared little thing, who was evidently listening curiously to the conversation. Mr. Mink said sharply to her:

"Number forty-seven! do you know anything about this bag business?"

"No—no, sir!" gasped the frightened girl.

"Then go on about your business," the floor-walker said, waving her away in his most lordly manner.

Meanwhile, Dorothy had obtained a word with the young Mr. Knapp who had done her and Tavia such a kindness.

"Thank you a thousand times, Mr. Knapp," she whispered, her eyes shining gratefully into his. "It might have been awkward for us without you. And," she added, pointedly, "how fortunate you knew our names!"

He was smiling broadly, but she saw the color rise in his bronzed cheeks at her last remark. She liked him all the better for blushing so boyishly.

"Got me there, Miss Dale," he blurted out. "I was curious, and I looked on the hotel register to see your names after the clerk brought it back from the parlor where he went to greet you yesterday. Hope you'll forgive me for being so—er—rubbery."

"It proves to be a very fortunate curiosity on your part," she told him, smiling.

"Say!" he whispered, "your friend is all broken up over this. Has she lost much?"

"All the money she had to pay for the clothes she wished to buy, I'm afraid," sighed Dorothy.

"Well, let's get her out of here—go somewhere to recuperate. There's a good hotel across the street. I had my breakfast there before I began

to shop," and he laughed. "A cup of tea will revive her, I'm sure."

"And you are suffering for a cup, too, I am sure," Dorothy told him, her eyes betraying her amusement, at his rather awkward attempt to become friendly with Tavia and herself.

But Dorothy approved of this young man. Aside from the assistance he had undoubtedly rendered her chum and herself, G. Knapp seemed to be far above the average young man.

She turned now quickly to Tavia. Mr. Schuman was saying very kindly:

"Search shall be made, my dear young lady. I am exceedingly sorry that such a thing should happen in our store. Of course, somebody picked up your bag before you inadvertently took the other lady's. If I had my way I would have it a law that every shopper should have her purse riveted to her wrist with a chain."

It was no laughing matter, however, for poor Tavia. Her family was not in the easy circumstances that Dorothy's was. Indeed, Mr. Travers was only fairly well-to-do, and Tavia's mother was exceedingly extravagant. It was difficult sometimes for Tavia to obtain sufficient money to get along with.

Besides, she was incautious herself. It was natural for her to be wasteful and thoughtless. But this was the first time in her experience that

she had either wasted or lost such a sum of money.

She wiped her eyes very quickly when Dorothy whispered to her that they were going out for a cup of tea with Mr. Knapp.

"Oh dear, that perfectly splendid cowboy person!" groaned Tavia. "And I am in no mood to make an impression. Doro! you'll have to do it all yourself this time. Do keep him in play until I recover from this blow—if I ever do."

The young man, who led the way to the side door of the store which was opposite the hotel and restaurant of which he had spoken, heard the last few words and turned to ask seriously:

"Surely Miss Travers did not lose *all* the money she had?"

"All I had in the world!" wailed Tavia. "Except a lonely little five dollar bill."

"Where is that?" asked Dorothy, in surprise.

"In the First National Bank," Tavia said demurely.

"Oh, then, *that's* safe enough," said Mr. Knapp.

"I didn't know you had even that much in the bank," remarked Dorothy, doubtfully. "The First National?"

"Yep!" declared Tavia promptly, but nudged her friend. "Hush!" she hissed.

Dorothy did not understand, but she saw there

was something queer about this statement. It was news to her that her chum ever thought of putting a penny on deposit in any bank. It was not like Tavia.

"How do you feel now, dear?" she asked the unfortunate girl, as they stepped out into the open air behind the broad-shouldered young Westerner, who held the door open for their passage.

"Oh, dear me!" sighed Tavia. "I'm forty degrees in the shade—and the temperature is still going down. What ever *shall* I do? I'll be positively naked before Thanksgiving!"

CHAPTER IV

SOMETHING ABOUT "G. KNAPP"

BUT how can three people with all the revivifying flow of youth in their veins remain in the dumps, to use one of Tavia's own illuminating expressions. Impossible! That tea at the Holyoke House, which began so miserably, scaled upward like the notes of a coloratura sporano until they were all three chatting and laughing like old friends. Even Tavia had to forget her miserable financial state.

Dorothy believed her first impression of G. Knapp had not been wrong. Indeed, he improved with every moment of increasing familiarity.

In the first place, although his repartee was bright enough, and he was very jolly and frank, he had eyes and attention for somebody besides the chatterbox, Tavia. Perhaps right at first Tavia was a little under the mark, her mind naturally being upon her troubles; but with a strange young man before her the gay and sparkling Tavia would soon be inspired.

However, for once she did not absorb all the more or less helpless male's attention. G. Knapp

insisted upon dividing equally his glances, his speeches, and his smiles between the two young ladies.

They discovered that his full and proper name was Garford Knapp—the first, of course, shortened to "Garry." He was of the West, Western, without a doubt. He had secured a degree at a Western university, although both before and after his scholastic course he had, as Tavia in the beginning suggested, been a "cowboy person."

"And it looks as if I'd be punching cows and doing other chores for Bob Douglas, who owns the Four-Square ranch, for the rest of my natural," was one thing Garry Knapp told the girls, and told them cheerfully. "I did count on falling heir to a piece of money when Uncle Terrence cashed in. But not—no more!"

"Why is that?" Dorothy asked, seeing that the young man was serious despite his somewhat careless way of speaking.

"The old codger is just like tinder," laughed Garry. "Lights up if a spark gets to him. And I unfortunately and unintentionally applied the spark. He's gone off to Alaska mad as a hatter and left me in the lurch. And we were chums when I was a kid and until I came back from college."

"You mean you have quarreled with your

uncle?" Dorothy queried, with some seriousness.

"Not at all, Miss Dale," he declared, promptly. "The old fellow quarreled with me. They say it takes two to make a quarrel. That's not always so. One can do it just as *e-easy*. At least, one like Uncle Terrence can. He had red hair when he was young, and he has a strong fighting Irish strain in him. The row began over nothing and ended with his lighting out between evening and sunrise and leaving me flat.

"Of course, I broke into a job with Bob Douglas right away——"

"Do you mean, Mr. Knapp, that your uncle went away and left you without money?" Dorothy asked.

"Only what I chanced to have in my pocket," Garry Knapp said cheerfully. "He'd always been mighty good to me. Put me through school and all that. All I have is a piece of land—and a good big piece—outside of Desert City; but it isn't worth much. Cattle raising is petering out in that region. Last year the mouth and hoof disease just about ruined the man that grazed my land. His cattle died like flies.

"Then, the land was badly grazed by sheepmen for years. Sheep about poison land for anything else to live on," he added, with a cattleman's usual disgust at the thought of "mutton on the hoof."

"One thing I've come East for, Miss Dale, is to sell that land. Got a sort of tentative offer by mail. Bob wanted a lot of stuff for the ranch and for his family and couldn't come himself. So I combined his business and mine and hope to make a sale of the land my father left me before I go back.

"Then, with that nest-egg, I'll try to break into some game that will offer a man-sized profit," and Garry Knapp laughed again in his mellow, whole-souled way.

"Isn't he just a *dear?*" whispered Tavia as Garry turned to speak to the waiter. "Don't you love to hear him talk?"

"And have you never heard from your old uncle who went away and left you?" Dorothy asked.

"Not a word. He's too mad to speak, let alone write," and a cloud for a moment crossed the open, handsome face of the Westerner. "But I know where he is, and every once in a while somebody writes me telling me Uncle Terry is all right."

"But, an old man, away up there in Alaska——?"

"Bless you, Miss Dale," chuckled Garry Knapp. "That dear old codger has been knocking about in rough country all his days. He's always been a miner. Prospected pretty well all

over our West. He's made, and then bunted away, big fortunes sometimes.

"He always has a stake laid down somewhere. Never gets real poor, and never went hungry in his life—unless he chanced to run out of grub on some prospecting tour, or his gun was broken and he couldn't shoot a jackrabbit for a stew.

"Oh, Uncle Terrence isn't at all the sort of hampered prospector you read about in the books. He doesn't go mooning around, expecting to 'strike it rich' and running the risk of leaving his bones in the desert.

"No, Uncle Terry is likely to make another fortune before he dies——"

"Oh! Then maybe you will be rich!" cried Tavia, breaking in.

"No." Garry shook his head with a quizzical smile on his lips and in his eyes. "No. He vowed I should never see the color of his money. First, he said, he'd leave it to found a home for indignant rattlesnakes. And he'd surely have plenty of inmates, for rattlers seem always to be indignant," he added with a chuckle.

Dorothy wanted awfully to ask him why he had quarreled with his uncle—or *vice versa;* but that would have been too personal upon first meeting. She liked the young man more and more; and in spite of Tavia's loss they parted at the end of the hour in great good spirits.

"I'm going to be just as busy as I can be this afternoon," Garry Knapp announced, as they went out. "But I shall get back to the hotel to supper. I wasn't in last night when you ladies were down. May I eat at your table?" and his eyes squinted up again in that droll way Dorothy had come to look for.

"How do you know we ate in the hotel last evening?" demanded Tavia, promptly.

"Asked the head waiter," replied Garry Knapp, unabashed.

"If you are so much interested in whether we take proper nourishment or not, you had better join us at dinner," Dorothy said, laughing.

"It's a bet!" declared the young Westerner, and lifting his broad-brimmed hat he left the girls upon the sidewalk outside the restaurant.

"Isn't he the very nicest—but, oh, Doro! what shall I do?" exclaimed the miserable Tavia. "All my money——"

"Let's go back and see if it's been found."

"Oh, not a chance!" gasped Tavia. "That horrid woman——"

"I scarcely believe that we can lay it to Mrs. Halbridge's door in any particular," said Dorothy, gravely. "You should not have left your bag on the counter."

"She laid hers there! And, oh, Doro! it was full of money," sighed her friend.

"Probably your bag had been taken before you even touched hers."

"Oh, dear! why did it have to happen to *me*—and at just this time. When I need things so much. Not a thing to wear! And it's going to to be a cold, cold winter, too!"

Tavia would joke "if the heavens fell"—that was her nature. But that she was seriously embarrassed for funds Dorothy Dale knew right well.

"If it had only been your bag that was lost," wailed Tavia, "you would telegraph to Aunt Winnie and get more money!"

"And I shall do that in this case," said her friend, placidly.

"Oh! no you won't!" cried Tavia, suddenly. "I will not take another cent from your Aunt Winnie White—who's the most blessed, generous, free, open-handed person who ever——"

"Goodness! no further attributes?" laughed Dorothy.

"No, Doro," Tavia said, suddenly serious. "I have done this thing myself. It is *awful.* Poor old daddy earns his money too hardly for *me* to throw it away. I should know better. I should have learned caution and economy by this time with you, my dear, as an example ever before me.

"Poor mother wastes money because she doesn't *know.* I have had every advantage of a

bright and shining example," and she pinched Dorothy's arm as they entered the big store again. "If I have lost my money, I've lost it, and that's the end of it. No new clothes for little Tavia—and serves her right!" she finished, bitterly.

Dorothy well knew that this was a tragic happening for her friend. Generously she would have sent for more money, or divided her own store with Tavia. But she knew her chum to be in earnest, and she approved.

It was not as though Tavia had nothing to wear. She had a full and complete wardrobe, only it would be no longer up to date. And she would have to curtail much of the fun the girls had looked forward to on this, their first trip, unchaperoned, to the great city.

CHAPTER V

DOROTHY IS DISTURBED

NOTHING, of course, had been seen or heard of Tavia's bag. Mr. Schuman himself had made the investigation, and he came to the girls personally to tell them how extremely sorry he was. But being sorry did not help.

"I'm done for!" groaned Tavia, as they returned to their rooms at the hotel just before luncheon. "I can't even buy a stick of peppermint candy to send to the kids at Dalton."

"How about that five dollars in the bank?" asked Dorothy, suddenly remembering Tavia's previous and most surprising statement. "And how did you ever come to have a bank account? Is it in the First National of Dalton?"

There was a laugh from Tavia, a sudden flash of lingerie and the display of a silk stocking. Then she held out to her chum a neatly folded banknote wrapped in tissue paper.

"First National Bank of Womankind," she cried gaily. "I always carry it there in case of accident—being run over, robbed, or an earthquake. But that five dollars is all I own. Oh,

dear! I wish I had stuffed the whole roll into my stocking."

"Don't, Tavia! it's not ladylike."

"I don't care. Pockets are out of style again," pouted her friend. "And, anyway, you must admit that *this* was a stroke of genius, for I would otherwise be without a penny."

However, Tavia was too kind-hearted, as well as light-hearted, to allow her loss to cloud the day for Dorothy. She was just as enthusiastic in the afternoon in helping her friend select the goods she wished to buy as though all the "pretties" were for herself.

They came home toward dusk, tired enough, and lay down for an hour—"relaxing as pèr instructions of Lovely Lucy Larriper, the afternoon newspaper statistician," Tavia said.

"Why 'statistician'?" asked Dorothy, wonderingly.

"Why! isn't she a 'figger' expert?" laughed Tavia. "Now relax!"

A brisk bath followed and then, at seven, the two girls stepped out of the elevator into the lobby of the hotel and found Garry Knapp waiting for them. He was likewise well tubbed and scrubbed, but he did not conform to city custom and wear evening dress. Indeed, Dorothy could not imagine him in the black and severe habiliments of society.

"Not that his figure would not carry them well," she thought. "But he would somehow seem out of place. Some of his breeziness and—and—yes!—his *nice* kind of 'freshness' would be gone. That gray business suit becomes him and so does his hat."

But, of course, the hat was not in evidence at present. The captain of the waiters had evidently expected this party, for he beckoned them to a retired table the moment the trio entered the long dining-room.

"How cozy!" exclaimed Dorothy. "You must have what they call a 'pull' with people in authority, Mr. Knapp."

"How's that?" he asked.

"Why, you can get the best table in the dining-room, and this morning you rescued us from trouble through your acquaintanceship with Mr. Schuman."

"The influence of the Almighty Dollar," said Garry Knapp, briefly. "This morning I had just spent several hundred dollars of Bob Douglass' good money in that store. And here at this hotel Bob's name is as good as a gold certificate."

"Oh, money! money!" groaned Tavia, "what crimes are committed in thy name—and likewise, what benefits achieved! I wonder what the person who stole it is doing with *my* money?"

"Perhaps it was somebody who needed it more

than you do," said Dorothy, rather quizzically.

"Can't be such a person. And needy people seldom find money. Besides, needy folk are always honest—in the books. I'm honest myself, and heaven knows I'm needy!"

"Was it truly all the money you had with you?" asked Garry Knapp, commiseratingly.

"Honest and true, black and blue, lay me down and cut me in two!" chanted Tavia.

"All but the five dollars in the bank," Dorothy said demurely, but with dancing eyes.

And for once Tavia actually blushed and was silenced—for a moment. Garry drawled:

"I wonder who did get your bag, Miss Travers? Of course, there are always light-fingered people hanging about a store like that."

"And the money will be put to no good use," declared the loser, dejectedly. "If the person finding it would only found a hospital—or something—with it, I'd feel a lot better. But I know just what will happen."

"What?" asked Dorothy.

"The person who took my bag will go and blow themselves to a fancy dinner—oh! better even than *this* one. I only hope he or she will eat so much that they will be sick——"

"Don't! don't!" begged Dorothy, stopping her ears. "You are dreadfully mixed in your grammar."

"Do you wonder? After having been robbed so ruthlessly?"

"But, certainly, dear," cooed Dorothy, "your knowledge of grammar was not in your bag, too?"

Thus they joked over Tavia's tragedy; but all the time Dorothy's agile mind was working hard to scheme out a way to help her chum over this very, very hard place.

Just at this time, however, she had to give some thought to Garry Knapp. He took out three slips of pasteboard toward the end of the very pleasant meal and flipped them upon the cloth.

"I took a chance," he said, in his boyish way. "There's a good show down the street—kill a little time. Vaudeville and pictures. Good seats."

"Oh, let's!" cried Tavia, clasping her hands.

Dorothy knew that the theatre in question was respectable enough, although the entertainment was not of the Broadway class. But she knew, too, that this young man from the West probably could not afford to pay two dollars or more for a seat for an evening's pleasure.

"Of course we'll be delighted to go. And we'd better go at once," Dorothy said, without hesitation. "I'm ready. Are you, Tavia?"

"You dear!" whispered Tavia, squeezing her arm as they followed Garry Knapp from the dining-room. "I never before knew you to be so amenable where a young man was concerned."

"Is that so?" drawled Dorothy, but hid her face from her friend's sharp eyes.

It was late, but a fine, bright, dry evening when the trio came out of the theatre and walked slowly toward their hotel. On the block in the middle of which the Fanuel was situated there were but few pedestrians. As they approached the main entrance to the hotel a girl came slowly toward them, peering, it seemed, sharply into their faces.

She was rather shabbily dressed, but was not at all an unattractive looking girl. Dorothy noticed that her passing glance was for Garry Knapp, not for herself or for Tavia. The young man had half dropped behind as they approached the hotel entrance and was saying:

"I think I'll take a brisk walk for a bit, having seen you ladies home after a very charming evening. I feel kind of shut in after that theatre, and want to expand my lungs."

"Good-night, then, Mr. Knapp," Dorothy said lightly. "And thank you for a pleasant evening."

"Ditto!" Tavia said, hiding a little yawn behind her gloved fingers.

The girls stepped toward the open door of the hotel. Garry Knapp wheeled and started back the way they had come. Tavia clutched her chum's arm with excitement.

"Did you see that girl?"

"Why—yes," Dorothy said wonderingly.

"Look back! Quick!"

Impelled by her chum's tone, Dorothy turned and looked up the street. Garry Knapp had overtaken the girl. The girl looked sidewise at him—they could see her turn her head—and then she evidently spoke. Garry dropped into slow step with her, and they strolled along, talking eagerly.

"Why, he must know her!" gasped Tavia.

"Why didn't he introduce her then?" Dorothy said shortly. "It serves me right."

"What serves you right?"

"For allowing you, as well as myself, to become so familiar with a strange man."

"Oh!" murmured Tavia, slowly. "It's not so bad as all *that*. You're making a mountain out of a molehill."

But Dorothy would not listen.

CHAPTER VI

SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY

TAVIA slept her usually sweet, sound sleep that night, despite the strange surroundings of the hotel and the happenings of a busy day; but Dorothy lay for a long time, unable to close her eyes.

In the morning, however, she was as deep in slumber as ever her chum was when a knock came on the door of their anteroom. Both girls sat up and said in chorus:

"Who's there?"

"It's jes' me, Missy," said the soft voice of the colored maid. "Did one o' youse young ladies lost somethin'?"

"Oh, mercy me, yes!" shouted Tavia, jumping completely out of her bed and running toward the door.

"Nonsense, Tavia!" admonished Dorothy, likewise hopping out of bed. "She can't have found your money."

"Oh! what is it, please?" asked Tavia, opening the door just a trifle.

"Has you lost somethin'?" repeated the colored girl.

"I lost my handbag in a store yesterday," said Tavia.

"Das it, Missy," chuckled the maid. "De clark, he axed me to ax yo' 'bout it. It's done come back."

"What's come back?" demanded Dorothy, likewise appearing at the door and in the same dishabille as her friend.

"De bag. De clark tol' me to tell yo' ladies dat all de money is safe in it, too. Now yo' kin go back to sleep again. He's done got de bag in he's safe;" and the girl went away chuckling.

Tavia fell up against the door and stared at Dorothy.

"Oh, Doro! Can it be?" she panted.

"Oh, Tavia! What luck!"

"There's the telephone! I'm going to call up the office," and Tavia darted for the instrument on the wall.

But there was something the matter with the wires; that was why the clerk had sent the maid to the room.

"Then I'm going to dress and go right down and see about it," Tavia said.

"But it's only six o'clock," yawned Dorothy. "The maid was right. We should go back to bed."

Her friend scorned the suggestion and she fairly "hopped" into her clothes.

"Be sure and powder your nose, dear," laughed Dorothy. "But I *am* glad for you, Tavia."

"Bother my nose!" responded her friend, running out of her room and into the corridor.

She whisked back again before Dorothy was more than half dressed with the precious bag in her hands.

"Oh, it is! it is!" she cried, whirling about Dorothy's room and her own and the bath and anteroom, in a dervish dance of joy. "Doro! Doro! I'm saved!"

"I don't know whether you are saved or not, dear. But you plainly are delighted."

"Every penny safe."

"Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes. I counted. I had to sign a receipt for the clerk, too. He is the *dearest* man."

"Well, dear, I hope this will be a lesson to you," Dorothy said.

"It will be!" declared the excited Tavia. "Do you know what I am going to do?"

"Spend your money more recklessly than ever, I suppose," sighed her friend.

"Say! seems to me you're awfully glum this morning. You're not nice about my good luck—not a bit," and Tavia stared at her in puzzlement.

"Of course I'm delighted that you should re-

cover your bag," Dorothy hastened to say. "How did it come back?"

"Why, the clerk gave it to me, I tell you."

"What clerk? The one at the silk counter?"

"Goodness! The hotel clerk downstairs."

"But how did *he* come by it?"

Tavia slowly sat down and blinked. "Why—why," she said, "I didn't even think to ask him."

"Well, Tavia!" exclaimed Dorothy, rather aghast at this admission of her flyaway friend.

"I do seem to have been awfully thoughtless again," admitted Tavia, slowly. "I thanked him —the clerk, I mean! Oh, I did! I could have kissed him!"

"Tavia!"

"I could; but I didn't," said the wicked Tavia, her eyes sparkling once more. "But I never thought to ask how he came by it. Maybe some poor person found it and should be rewarded. Should I give a tithe of it, Doro, as a reward, as we give a tithe to the church? Let's see! I had just eighty-nine dollars and thirty-seven cents, and an old copper penny for a pocket-piece. One-tenth of that would be——"

"Do be sensible!" exclaimed Dorothy, rather tartly for her. "You might at least have asked how the bag was sent here—whether by the store itself, or by some employee, or brought by some outside person."

"Goodness! if it were your money would you have been so curious?" demanded Tavia. "I don't believe it. You would have been just as excited as I was."

"Perhaps," admitted Dorothy, after a moment. "Anyway, I'm glad you have it back, dear."

"And do you know what I am going to do? I am going to take that old man's advice."

"What old man, Tavia?"

"That Mr. Schuman—the head of the big store. I am going to go out right after breakfast and buy me a dog chain and chain that bag to my wrist."

Dorothy laughed at this—yet she did not laugh happily. There was something wrong with her, and as soon as Tavia began to quiet down a bit she noticed it again.

"Doro," she exclaimed, "I do believe something has happened to you!"

"What something?"

"I don't know. But you are not—not happy. What is it?"

"Hungry," said Dorothy, shortly. "Do stop primping now and come on down to breakfast."

"Well, you must be savagely hungry then, if it makes you like this," grumbled Tavia. "And it is an hour before our usual breakfast time."

They went down in the elevator to the lower

floor, Tavia carrying the precious bag. She would not trust it out of her sight again, she said, as long as a penny was left in it.

She attempted to go over to the clerk's desk at the far side of the lobby to ask for the details of the recovery of her bag; but there were several men at the desk and Dorothy stopped her.

"Wait until he is more at leisure," she advised Tavia. "And until there are not so many men about."

"Oh, nonsense!" ejaculated Tavia, but she turned to follow Dorothy. Then she added: "Ah, there is one you won't mind speaking to——"

"Where?" cried Dorothy, stopping instantly.

"Going into the dining-room," said Tavia.

Dorothy then saw the gray back of Garford Knapp ahead of them. She turned swiftly for the exit of the hotel.

"Come!" she said, "let's get a breath of air before breakfast. It—it will give us an appetite!" And she fairly dragged Tavia to the sidewalk.

"Well, I declare to goodness!" volleyed Tavia, staring at her. "And just now you were as hungry as a bear. And you still seem to have a bear's nature. How rough! Don't you want to see that young man?"

"Never!" snapped Dorothy, and started straight along toward the Hudson River.

Tavia was for the moment silenced. But after a bit she asked slyly:

"You're not really going to walk clear home, are you, dear? North Birchland is a long, long walk—and the river intervenes."

Dorothy had to laugh. But her face almost immediately fell into very serious lines. Tavia, for once, considered her chum's feelings. She said nothing regarding Garry Knapp.

"Well," she murmured. "*I* need no appetite—no more than I have. Aren't you going to eat at all this morning, Dorothy?"

"Here is a restaurant; let us go in," said her friend promptly.

They did so, and Dorothy lingered over the meal (which was nowhere as good as that they would have secured at the Fanuel) until she was positive that Mr. Knapp must have finished his own breakfast and left the hotel.

In fact, they saw him run out and catch a car in front of the hotel entrance while they were still some rods from the door. Dorothy at once became brisker of movement, hurrying Tavia along.

"We must really shop to-day," she said with decision. "Not merely look and window-shop."

"Surely," agreed Tavia.

"And we'll not come back to luncheon—it takes too much time," Dorothy went on, as they hurried into the elevator. "Perhaps we can get tick-

ets for that nice play Ned and Nat saw when they were down here last time. Then, if we do, we will stay uptown for dinner——"

"Mercy! All that time in the same clothes and without the prescribed 'relax'?" groaned Tavia. "We'll look as though we had been ground between the upper and the nether millstone."

"Well——"

They had reached their rooms. Tavia turned upon her and suddenly seized Dorothy by both shoulders, looking accusingly into her friend's eyes.

"I know what you are up to. You are running away from that man."

"Oh! What——"

"Never mind trying to dodge the issue," said Tavia, sternly. "That Garry Knapp. And it seems he must be a pretty nappy sort, sure enough. He probably knew that girl and was ashamed to have us see him speaking to one so shabby. Now! what do you care what he does?"

"I don't," denied Dorothy, hotly. "I'm only ashamed that we have been seen with him. And it is my fault."

"I'd like to know why?"

"It was unnecessary for us to have become so friendly with him just because he did us a favor."

"Yes—but——"

"It was I. I did it," said Dorothy, almost in

tears. "We should never allow ourselves to become acquainted with strangers in any such way. Now you see what it means, Tavia. It is not your fault—it is mine. But it should teach you a lesson as well as me."

"Goodness!" said the startled Tavia. "I don't see that it is anything very terrible. The fellow is really nothing to us."

"But people having seen us with him—and then seeing him with that common-acting girl——"

"Pooh! what do we care?" repeated Tavia. "Garry Knapp is nothing to us, and never would be."

Dorothy said not another word, but turned quickly away from her friend. She was very quiet while they made ready for their shopping trip, and Tavia could not arouse her.

Careless and unobservant as Tavia was, anything seriously the matter with her chum always influenced her. She gradually "simmered down" herself, and when they started forth from their rooms both girls were morose.

As they passed through the lobby a bellhop was called to the desk, and then he charged after the two girls.

"Please, Miss! Which is Miss Dale?" he asked, looking at the letter in his hand.

Dorothy held out her hand and took it. It was written on the hotel stationery, and the handwrit-

ing was strange to her. She tore it open at once. She read the line or two of the note, and then stopped, stunned.

"What is it?" asked Tavia, wonderingly.

Dorothy handed her the note. It was signed "G. Knapp" and read as follows:

"Dear Miss Dale:

"Did your friend get her bag and money all right?"

CHAPTER VII

GARRY SEES A WALL AHEAD

"WHY, what under the sun! How did *he* come to know about it?" demanded Tavia. "Goodness!"

"He—he maybe—had something to do with recovering it for you," Dorothy said faintly. Yet in her heart she knew that it was hope that suggested the idea, not reason.

"Well, I am going to find out right now," declared Tavia Travers, and she marched back to the clerk's desk before Dorothy could object, had she desired to.

"This note to my friend is from Mr. Knapp, who is stopping here," Tavia said to the young man behind the counter. "Did he have anything to do with getting back my bag?"

"I know nothing about your bag, Miss," said the clerk. "I was not on duty, I presume, when it was handed in. You are Miss——"

"Travers."

The clerk went to the safe and found a memorandum, which he read and then returned to the desk.

"Your supposition is correct, Miss Travers. Mr. Knapp handed in the handbag and took a receipt for it."

"When did he do that?" asked Tavia, quickly, almost overpowered with amazement.

"Some time during the night. Before I came on duty at seven o'clock."

"Well! isn't that the strangest thing?" Tavia said to Dorothy, when she rejoined her friend at the hotel entrance after thanking the clerk.

"How ever could he have got it in the night?" murmured Dorothy.

"Say! he's all right—Garry Knapp is!" Tavia cried, shaking the bag to which she now clung so tightly, and almost on the verge of doing a few "steps of delight" on the public thoroughfare. "I could hug him!"

"It—it is very strange," murmured Dorothy, for she was still very much disturbed in her mind.

"It's particularly jolly," said Tavia. "And I am going to—well, thank him, at least," as she saw her friend start and glance at her admonishingly, "just the very first chance I get. But I ought to hug him! He deserves *some* reward. You said yourself that perhaps I should reward the finder."

"Mr. Knapp could not possibly have been the finder. The bag was merely returned through him." Dorothy spoke positively.

"Don't care. I must be grateful to somebody," wailed Tavia. "Don't nip my finer feelings in the bud. Your name should be Frost—Mademoiselle Jacquesette Frost! You're always nipping me."

Dorothy, however, remained grave. She plainly saw that this incident foretold complications. She had made up her mind that she and Tavia would have nothing more to do with the Westerner, Garry Knapp; and now her friend would insist on thanking him—of course, she must if only for politeness' sake—and any further intercourse with Mr. Knapp would make the situation all the more difficult.

She wished with all her heart that their shopping was over, and then she could insist upon taking the train immediately out of New York, even if she had to sink to the abhorred subterfuge of playing ill, and so frightening Tavia.

She wished they might move to some other hotel; but if they did that an explanation must be made to Aunt Winnie as well as to Tavia. It seemed to Dorothy that she blushed all over—fairly *burned*—whenever she thought of discussing her feelings regarding Garry Knapp.

Never before in her experience had Dorothy Dale been so quickly and so favorably impressed by a man. Tavia had joked about it, but she by no means understood how deeply Dorothy felt.

And Dorothy would have been mortified to the quick had she been obliged to tell even her dearest chum the truth.

Dorothy's home training had been most delicate. Of course, in the boarding school she and Tavia had attended there were many sorts of girls; but all were from good families, and Mrs. Pangborn, the preceptress of Glenwood, had had a strict oversight over her girls' moral growth as well as over their education.

Dorothy's own cousins, Ned and Nat White, though collegians, and of what Tavia called "the harum-scarum type" like herself, were clean, upright fellows and possessed no low ideas or tastes. It seemed to Dorothy for a man to make the acquaintance of a strange girl on the street and talk with her as Garry Knapp seemed to have done, savored of a very coarse mind, indeed.

And all the more did she criticise his action because he had taken advantage of the situation of herself and her friend and "picked acquaintance" in somewhat the same fashion with them on their entrance into New York.

He was "that kind." He went about making the acquaintance of every girl he saw who would give him a chance to speak to her! That is the way it looked to Dorothy in her present mood.

She gave Garry Knapp credit for being a Westerner and being not as conservative as Eastern

folk. She knew that people in the West were freer and more easily to become acquainted with than Eastern people. But she had set that girl down as a common flirt, and she believed no gentleman would so easily and naturally fall into conversation with her as Garry Knapp had, unless he were quite used to making such acquaintances.

It shamed Dorothy, too, to think that the young man should go straight from her and Tavia to the girl.

That was the thought that made the keenest wound in Dorothy Dale's mind.

They shopped "furiously," as Tavia declared, all the morning, only resting while they ate a bite of luncheon in one of the big stores, and then went at it again immediately afterward.

"The boys talk about 'bucking the line' about this time of year—football slang, you know," sighed Tavia; "but believe me! this is some 'bucking.' I never shopped so fast and furiously in all my life. Dorothy, you actually act as though you wanted to get it all over with and go home. And we can stay a week if we like. We're having no fun at all."

Dorothy would not answer. She wished they could go home. It seemed to her as though New York City was not big enough in which to hide away from Garry Knapp.

They could not secure seats—not those they

wanted—for the play Ned and Nat had told them to see, for that evening; and Tavia insisted upon going back to the hotel.

"I am done up," she announced. "I am a dish-rag. I am a disgrace to look at, and I feel that if I do not follow Lovely Lucy Larriper's advice and relax, I may be injured for life. Come, Dorothy, we must go back to our rooms and lie down, or I shall lie right down here in the gutter and do my relaxing."

They returned to the hotel, and Dorothy almost ran through the lobby to the elevator, she was so afraid that Garry Knapp would be waiting there. She felt that he would be watching for them. The note he had written her that morning proved that he was determined to keep up their acquaintanceship if she gave him the slightest opening.

"And I'll never let him—never!" she told herself angrily.

"Goodness! how can you hurry so?" plaintively panted Tavia, as she sank into the cushioned seat in the elevator.

All the time they were resting, Dorothy was thinking of Garry. He would surely be downstairs at dinner time, waiting his chance to approach them. She had a dozen ideas as to how she would treat him—and none of them seemed good ideas.

She was tempted to write him a note in answer to the line he had left with the clerk for her that morning, warning him never to speak to her friend or herself again. But then, how could she do so bold a thing?

Tavia got up at last and began to move about her room. "Aren't you going to get up ever again, Doro?" she asked. "Doesn't the inner man call for sustenance? Or even the outer man? I'm just crazy to see Garry Knapp and ask him how he came by my bag."

"Oh, Tavia! I wish you wouldn't," groaned Dorothy.

"Wish I wouldn't what?" demanded her friend, coming to her open door with a hairbrush in her hand and wielding it calmly.

Dorothy "bit off" what she had intended to say. She could not bring herself to tell Tavia all that was in her mind. She fell back upon that "white fib" that seems first in the feminine mind when trouble portends:

"I've *such* a headache!"

"Poor dear!" cried Tavia. "I should think you had. You ate scarcely any luncheon——"

"Oh, don't mention eating!" begged Dorothy, and she really found she did have a slight headache now that she had said so.

"Don't you want your dinner?" cried Tavia, in horror.

"No, dear. Just let me lie here. You—you go down and eat. Perhaps I'll have something light by and by."

"That's what the Esquimau said when he ate the candle," said Tavia, but without smiling. It was a habit with Tavia, this saying something funny when she was thinking of something entirely foreign to her remark.

"You're not going to be sick, are you, Doro?" she finally asked.

"No, indeed, my dear."

"Well! you've acted funny all day."

"I don't feel a bit funny," groaned Dorothy. "Don't make me talk—now."

So Tavia, who could be sympathetic when she chose, stole away and dressed quietly. She looked in at Dorothy when she was ready to go downstairs, and as her chum lay with her eyes closed Tavia went out without speaking.

Garry Knapp was fidgeting in the lobby when Tavia stepped out of the car. His eye brightened —then clouded again. Tavia noticed it, and her conclusion bore out the thought she had evolved about Dorothy upstairs.

"Oh, Mr. Knapp!" she cried, meeting him with both hands outstretched. "Tell me! How did you find my bag?"

And Garry Knapp was impolite enough to put her question aside for the moment while he asked:

"Where's Miss Dale?"

Two hours later Tavia returned to her chum. Garry walked out of the hotel with his face heavily clouded.

"Just my luck! She's a regular millionaire. Her folks have got more money than I'll ever even *see* if I beat out old Methuselah in age! And Miss Tavia says Miss Dale will be rich in her own right. Ah, Garry, old man! There's a blank wall ahead of you. You can't jump it in a hurry. You haven't got the *spring*. And this little mess of money I may get for the old ranch won't put me in Miss Dorothy Dale's class—not by a million miles!"

He walked away from the hotel, chewing on this thought as though it had a very, very bitter taste.

CHAPTER VIII

AND STILL DOROTHY IS NOT HAPPY

"BUT what did he *say?*" demanded Dorothy, almost wildly, sitting up in bed at Tavia's first announcement. "I want to know what he *said!*"

"We-ell, maybe he didn't tell the truth," said Tavia, slowly.

"We'll find out about that later," Dorothy declared. "Go on."

"How?"

"Why, of course we must hunt up these girls and give them something for returning your bag."

"Oh! I s'pose so," Tavia said. "Though I guess the little one, Number Forty-seven, wanted to keep it."

"Now, tell me a*ll,*" breathed Dorothy, her eyes shining. "All he said—every word."

"Goodness! I guess your headache is better, Doro Dale," laughed Tavia, sitting down on the edge of the bed. Dorothy said not a word, but her "listening face" put Tavia on her mettle.

"Well, the very first thing he said," she told her chum, her eyes dancing, "when I ran up to him and thanked him for getting my bag, was:

" 'Where's Miss Dale?'

"What do you know about *that?*" cried Tavia, in high glee. "You have made a deep, wide, long, and high impression—a four-dimension impression—on that young man from the 'wild and woolly.' Oh yes, you have!"

The faint blush that washed up into Dorothy Dale's face like a gentle wave on the sea-strand made her look "ravishing," so Tavia declared. She simply had to stop to hug her friend before she went on. Dorothy recovered her serenity almost at once.

"Don't tease, dear," she said. "Go on with your story."

"You see, the little cash-girl—or 'check', as they call them—picked the bag up off the floor and hid it under her apron. Then she was scared—especially when Mr. Schuman chanced to come upon us all as we were quarreling. I suppose Mr. Schuman seems like a god to little Forty-seven.

"Anyhow," Tavia pursued, "whether the child meant to steal the bag or not at first, she was afraid to say anything about it then. Her sister—this girl who came to the hotel—works in the house furnishing department. Before night Forty-seven told her sister. She had heard Mr. Knapp's name, and from the shipping clerk the big girl obtained the name of the hotel at which Mr. Knapp was staying. Do you see?"

"Yes," breathed Dorothy. "Go on, dear."

"Why, the girl just came here and asked for Mr. Knapp and found he was out. She didn't know any better than to linger about outside and wait for him to appear—like Mary's little lamb, you know! Little Forty-seven had told her sister what Mr. Knapp looked like, of course."

"Of course!" cried Dorothy, agreeing again, but in such a tone that Tavia frankly stared at her.

"I do wish I knew just what is the matter with you to-day, Doro," she murmured.

"And the rest of it?" demanded Dorothy, her eyes shining and her cheeks still pink.

"Why, when little Forty-seven's sister saw us with Mr. Knapp she jumped to the correct conclusion that we were the girls who had lost the money, and so she was afraid to speak right out before us——"

"Why?"

"Well, Dorothy," said Tavia, with considerable gravity for her, "I guess because of the old and well-established reason."

"What's that?"

"Because a man will be kinder to a girl in trouble than other girls will—ordinarily, I mean."

"Oh, Tavia!"

"Suppose it had been that Mrs. Halbridge who

had really lost her bag," Tavia went on to say. "If this girl had tried to return it, she and little Forty-seven both would have lost their jobs. Perhaps the police would have been called in. Do you see? I expect the big girl read kindness in Mr. Knapp's face——"

Dorothy suddenly threw both arms about Tavia, and hugged her tightly. "Oh, you *dear!*" she cried; but she would not explain what she meant by this sudden burst of affection.

"Go on!" was her repeated demand.

"You are insatiable, my dear," laughed Tavia. "Well, there isn't much more 'go on' to it. The girl spoke to him when he passed her on the street and quickly told him all the story. Of course, he promised that nothing should happen to either of them. They are honest girls—the older one at least. And the temptation came so suddenly to little Forty-seven, whose wages are so pitiably small."

"I know," said Dorothy, gently. "You remember, we learned something about it when little Miette De Pleau told us how she worked as cash-girl here years ago."

"Of course I remember," Tavia said. "Well, that's all, I guess. Oh no! I asked Mr. Knapp if he didn't notice the big girl staring at us as we got to the hotel door last night. And what do you suppose he said?"

"I don't know," and Dorothy was still smiling happily.

"Why, he said he didn't. 'You see,' he added, in that funny way of his, 'I expect my eyes were elsewhere'; and he wasn't complimenting *me,* either," added Tavia, rolling her big eyes. "Whom do you suppose he could have meant he was looking at, Doro?"

Her friend ignored the question, but hopped out of bed.

"What are you going to do?" asked Tavia, in wonder.

"Dress."

"But it is nine o'clock! Almost bedtime."

"Bedtime?" demanded Dorothy. "And in the city? Why, Tavia! you amaze me, child!"

"But you're not going out?" cried her friend.

"Do you realize I haven't had a bite of dinner?" demanded the bold Dorothy. "I think you are very selfish."

"Well, anyway," snapped Tavia, suddenly showing her claws—and who does not once in a while?—"*he's* gone out for a long walk and he expects to finish his business to-morrow and go home."

"Oh!" gasped Dorothy.

She sat on the edge of her bed with her first stocking in her hand. Tavia had gone back into her own room. Had she been present she must

have noticed all the delight fading out of Dorothy Dale's countenance. Finally, the latter tossed away the stocking, and crept back into bed.

"I—I guess I'm too lazy to dress after all, dear," she said, in a still little voice. "And you are tired, too, Tavia. The telephone has been fixed; just call down, will you, and ask them to send me up some tea and toast?"

CHAPTER IX

THEY SEE GARRY'S BACK

THE following day Dorothy was her old cheerful self—or so Tavia thought. They did not shop with such abandon, but took matters more easily. And they returned to the hotel for luncheon and for rest.

"But he isn't here!" Tavia exclaimed, when they entered the big restaurant for the midday meal. "And I remember now he said last evening that he would probably be down town almost all day to-day—trying to sell that property of his, you know."

"Who, dear?" asked Dorothy, with a far-away look on her face.

"Peleg Swift!" snapped Tavia. "You know very well of whom I am talking. Garry Owen!" and she hummed a few bars of the old, old march.

Garry certainly was not present; but Dorothy still smiled. They went out again and purchased a few more things. When they returned late in the afternoon the young Westerner was visible in the lobby the moment the girls came through the doorway.

But he was busy. He did not even see them. He was talking with two men of pronounced New York business type who might have been brokers or Wall Street men. All three sat on a lounge near the elevators, and Dorothy heard one of the strangers say crisply, as she and Tavia waited for a car:

"That's our top price, I think, Mr. Knapp. And, of course, we cannot pay you any money until I have seen the land, save the hundred for the option. I shall be out in a fortnight, I believe. It must hang fire until then, even at this price."

"Well, Mr. Stiffbold—it's a bet!" Garry said, and Dorothy could imagine the secret sigh he breathed. Evidently, he was not getting the price for the wornout ranch that he had hoped.

The two girls went up in the elevator and later made their dinner toilet. To-night Dorothy was the one who took the most pains in her primping; but Tavia said never a word. Nevertheless, she "looked volumes."

They were downstairs again not much later than half past six. Not a sign of Garry Knapp either in the lobby or in the dining-room. The girls ate their dinner slowly and "lived in hopes," as Tavia expressed it.

Both were frankly hoping Garry would appear. Tavia was grateful to him for the part he

had taken in the recovery of her bag; and, too, he was "nice." Dorothy felt that she had misjudged the young Westerner, and she was fired with a desire to be particularly pleasant to him so as to salve over her secret compunctions of conscience.

"'He cometh not, she said,'" Tavia complained. "What's the matter with the boy, anyway? Can he be eating in the cafê with those two men?"

"Oh, Tavia!" suddenly exclaimed Dorothy. "You said he was going home to-day."

"Oh—ah—yes. He did say he expected to get out for the West again some time to-day——"

"Maybe he's go-o-one!" and Dorothy's phrase was almost a wail.

"Goodness! Never! Without looking us up and saying a word of good-bye?"

Dorothy got up with determination. "I am going to find out," she said. "I feel that I would like to see Mr. Knapp again."

"Well! if *I* said a thing like that about a young man——"

However, Tavia let the remark trail off into silence and followed her chum. As they came out of the dining-room the broad shoulders and broad-brimmed hat of Garry Knapp were going through the street door!

"Oh!" gasped Dorothy.

"He's going!" added Tavia, stricken quite as motionless.

"Going——"

"Gone!" ended Tavia, sepulchrally. "It's all off, Dorothy. Garry Knapp, of Desert City, has, departed."

"Oh, we must stop him—speak to him——"

Dorothy started for the door and Tavia, nothing loath, followed at a sharp pace. Just as they came out into the open street a car stopped before the hotel door and Garry Knapp, "bag and baggage" stepped aboard. He did not even look back!

As the girls returned to the hotel lobby the two men with whom they had seen Garry Knapp earlier in the evening, were passing out. They lingered while one of the men lit his cigar, and Dorothy heard the second man speaking.

"I could have paid him spot cash for the land right here and been sure of a bargain, Lightly. I know just where it is and all about it. But it will do no harm to let the thing hang fire till I get out there. Perhaps, if I'm not too eager, I can get him to knock off a few dollars per acre. The boy wants to sell—that's sure."

"Uh-huh!" grunted the one with the cigar. "It'll make a tidy piece of wheat land without doubt, Stiffbold. You go for it!"

They passed out then and the girl who had lis-

tened followed her friend slowly to the elevator, deep in thought. She said not a word until they were upstairs again. Perhaps her heart was really too full just then for utterance.

As they entered Dorothy's room the girls saw that the maid had been in during their absence at dinner. There was a long box, unmistakably a florist's box, on the table.

"Oh, see what's here!" cried Tavia, springing forward.

The card on the box read: "Miss Dale."

"For you!" cried Tavia. "What meaneth it, fair Lady Dorothy? Hast thou made a conquest already? Some sweet swain——"

"I don't believe you know what a 'sweet swain' is," laughed Dorothy.

Her fingers trembled as she untied the purple cord. Tavia asked, with increased curiosity:

"Who can they be from, Doro? Flowers, of course!"

Dorothy said nothing in reply; but in her heart she knew—she knew! The cord was untied at last, the tissue paper, all fragrant and dewy, lifted.

"Why!" said Tavia, rather in disappointment and doubt. "Not roses—or chrysanthemums—or—or——"

"Or anything foolish!" finished Dorothy, firmly.

She lifted from their bed of damp moss a

bouquet of the simplest old-fashioned flowers; mignonette, and several long-stemmed, dewy violets and buttercups, pansies, forget-me-nots——

"He must have been robbing all the old-fashioned gardens around New York," said Tavia. "But that's a lovely ribbon—and yards of it."

Dorothy did not speak at first. The cost of the gift meant nothing to her. Yet she knew that the monetary value of such a bouquet in New York must be far above what was ordinarily paid for roses and the like.

A note was nestling in the stems. She opened it and read:

"Dear Miss Dale:

"Was mighty sorry to hear you are still in retirement. Your friend said last evening that you were quite done-up. Now I am forced to leave in a hurry without seeing you. Sent bellhop up to your room and he reports 'no answer.'

"But, without seeming too bold, will hope that we shall meet again—and that these few flowers will be a reminder of

"Faithfully and regretfully yours,

"G. KNAPP."

CHAPTER X

"HEART DISEASE"

After one passes the railroad station at The Beeches, and before reaching the town limits of North Birchland, the traveler sees a gray road following closely the railway tracks, sometimes divided from them by rail-fences, sometimes by a ditch, and sometimes the railway roadbed is high on a bank overlooking the highway.

For several miles the road grades downward—not a sharp grade, but a steady one—and so does the railroad. At the foot of the slope the highway keeps straight on over a bridge that spans the deep and boisterous creek; but a fork of the road turns abruptly and crosses the railroad at grade.

There is no flagman at this grade crossing, nor is there a drop-gate. Just a "Stop, Look, Listen" sign—two words of which are unnecessary, as some philosopher has pointed out. There had been some serious accidents at this crossing; but thus far the railroad company had found it cheaper to pay court damages than to pay a flagman and the upkeep of a proper gate on both sides of its right-of-way.

When they came in sight of the down-hill part of the road Dorothy Dale and Tavia Travers knew it was time to begin to put on their wraps and take down their bags. The North Birchland station would soon be in sight.

It was Dorothy who first stood up to reach for her bag. As she did so she glanced through the broad window, out upon the highway.

"Oh, Tavia!" she gasped.

"What's the matter, dear? You don't see Garry Knapp, do you? Maybe his buying those flowers—that 'parting blessing'—'busted' him and he's got to walk home clear to Desert City."

"Don't be a goose!" half laughed Dorothy. "Look out. See if you see what I see."

"Why, Doro! it's Joe and Roger I do believe!"

"I was sure it was," returned her friend. "What *can* those boys be doing now?"

"Well, what they are doing seems plain enough," said Tavia. "What they are going to do is the moot question, my dear. You never know what a boy will do next, or what he did last; you're only sure of what he is doing just now."

What the young brothers of Dorothy Dale were doing at that moment was easily explained. They were riding down the long slope of the gray road toward North Birchland, racing with the train Dorothy and Tavia were on. The vehicle upon which the boys were riding was a nondescript thing

composed of a long plank, four wheels, a steering arrangement of more or less dependence, and a soap box.

In the soap box was a bag, and unless the girls were greatly mistaken Joe and Roger Dale had been nutting over toward The Beeches, and the bag was filled with hickory nuts and chestnuts in their shells and burrs.

Roger, who was the youngest, and whom Dorothy continued to look upon as a baby, occupied the box with the nuts. Joe, who was fifteen, straddled the plank with his feet on the rests and steered. The boys' vehicle was going like the wind. It looked as though a small stone in the road, or an uncertain jerk by Joe on the steering lines, would throw the contraption on which they rode sideways and dump out the boys.

"Enough to give one heart disease," said Tavia. "I declare! small brothers are a nuisance. When I'm at home in Dalton I have to wear blinders so as not to see *my* kid brothers at their antics."

"If something should happen, Tavia!" murmured Dorothy.

"Something is always happening. But not often is it something bad," said Tavia, coolly. " 'There's a swate little cherub that sits up aloft, and kapes out an eye for poor Jack,' as the Irish tar says. And there is a similar cherub looking out for small boys—or a special providence."

The train was now high on the embankment over the roadway. The two boys sliding down the hill looked very small, indeed, below the car windows.

"Suppose a wagon should start up the hill," murmured Dorothy.

"There's none in sight. I never saw the road more deserted—oh, Doro!"

Tavia uttered this cry before she thought. She had looked far ahead to the foot of the hill and had seen something that her friend had not yet observed.

"What is it?" gasped Dorothy, whose gaze was still fixed upon her brothers.

"My dear! The bridge!"

The words burst from Tavia involuntarily. She could not keep them in.

At the foot of the hill the road forked as has before been shown. To the left it crossed the railroad tracks at grade. Of course, these reckless boys had not intended to try for the crossing ahead of the train. But the main road, which kept straight on beside the tracks, crossed the creek on a wooden bridge. Tavia, looking ahead, saw that the bridge boards were up and there was a rough fence built across the main road!

"They'll be killed!" screamed Dorothy Dale, and sank back into her chair.

The train was now pitching down the grade.

It was still a mile to the foot of the slope where railroad and highway were on a level again. The boys in their little "scooter" were traveling faster than the train itself, for the brakes had been applied when the descent was begun.

The boys and their vehicle, surrounded by a little halo of dust, were now far ahead of the chair car in which their sister and Tavia rode. The girls, clinging to each other, craned their necks to see ahead. There were not many other passengers in the car and nobody chanced to notice the horror-stricken girls.

It was a race between the boys and the train, and the boys would never be able to halt their vehicle on the level at the bottom of the hill before crashing into the fence that guarded the open bridge.

Were the barrier not there, the little cart would dart over the edge of the masonry wall of the bridge and all be dashed into the deep and rock-strewn bed of the creek.

There was but one escape for the boys in any event. Perhaps their vehicle could be guided to the left, into the branch road and so across the railroad track. But if Joe undertook that would not the train be upon them?

"Heart disease," indeed! It seemed to Dorothy Dale as though her own heart pounded so that she could no longer breathe. Her eyes

strained to see the imperiled boys down in the road.

The "scooter" ran faster and faster or was the train itself slowing down?

"For sure and certain they are beating us!" murmured Tavia.

She could appreciate the sporting chance in the race; but to Dorothy there loomed up nothing but the peril facing her brothers.

The railroad tracks pitched rather sharply here. It was quite a descent into the valley where North Birchland lay. When the engineers of the passenger trains had any time to make up running west they could always regain schedule on this slope.

Dorothy knew this. She realized that the engineer, watching the track ahead and not the roadway where the boys were, might be tempted to release his brakes when half way down the slope and increase his speed.

If he did so and the boys, Joe and Roger, turned to cross the rails, the train must crash into the "scooter."

CHAPTER XI

A BOLD THING TO DO!

THE threatening peril—which looked so sure to Dorothy Dale if to nobody else—inspired her to act, not to remain stunned and helpless. She jerked her hand from Tavia's clutch and sprang to her feet. She had been reaching for her bag on first observing the boys coasting down the long hill beside the railroad tracks; and her umbrella was in the rack, too. She seized this. Its handle was a shepherd's crook. Reaching with it, and without a word to Tavia, she hooked the handle into the emergency cord that ran overhead the length of the car, and pulled down sharply. Instantly there was a shriek from the engine whistle and the brakes were sharply applied.

The brake shoes so suddenly applied to the wheels on this downgrade did much harm to the wheels themselves. Little cared Dorothy for this well-known fact. If every wheel under the train had to go to the repair shop she would have made this bold attempt to stop the train or retard its speed, so that Joe and Roger could cross the tracks ahead of it.

Glancing through the window she saw the boys' "scooter" dart swiftly and safely into the fork-road and disappear some rods ahead of the pilot of the engine. The boys were across before the brakeman and the Pullman conductor opened the car door and rushed in.

"Who pulled that emergency cord? Anybody here?" shouted the conductor.

"Oh! don't tell him!" breathed Tavia.

But her friend, if physically afraid, was never a moral coward. She looked straight into the angry conductor's face and said:

"I did."

"What for?" he demanded.

"To stop the train. My brothers were in danger——"

"Say! What's that?" demanded the Pullman conductor of Tavia. "Where are her brothers?"

The brakeman, who had long run over this road, pulled at the conductor's sleeve.

"That's Major Dale's girl," he whispered, and Tavia heard if Dorothy did not.

"Who's Major Dale?" asked the conductor, in a low voice, turning aside. "Somebody on the road?"

"Owns stock in it all right. And a bigwig around North Birchland. Go easy, I say," advised the brakeman, immediately turning back to the door.

The train, meanwhile, had started on again, for undoubtedly the other conductor had given the engineer the signal to go ahead. Through the window across the car Dorothy could see out upon the road beyond the tracks. There was the little "scooter" at a standstill. Joe and Roger were standing up and waving their caps at the train.

"They're safe!" Dorothy cried to Tavia.

"I see they are; but you're not—yet," returned her chum.

"Who's that is safe?" asked the conductor, still in doubt.

"My brothers—there," answered Dorothy, pointing. "They had to cross in front of the train because the bridge is open. They couldn't stop at the bottom of the hill."

The Pullman conductor understood at last. "But I'll have to make a report of this, Miss Dale," he said, complainingly.

Dorothy had seated herself and she was very pale. The fright for her at least had been serious.

"Make a dozen reports if you like—help yourself," said Tavia, tartly, bending over her friend. "If there is anything to pay send the bill to Major Dale."

The conductor grumbled something and went out, notebook in hand. In a few moments the train came to a standstill at the North Birchland

station. The girls had to bestir themselves to get out in season, and that helped rouse Dorothy.

"Those rascals!" said Tavia, once they were on the platform. "Joe and Roger should be spanked."

"I'm afraid Joe is too big for that," sighed Dorothy. "And who would spank them? It is something they didn't get when they were little——"

"And see the result!"

"Your brothers were whipped sufficiently, I am sure," Dorothy said, smiling at length. "They are not one whit better than Joe and Roger."

"Dear me! that's so," admitted Tavia. "But just the same, I belieev in whippings—for boys."

"And no whippings for girls?"

"I should say not!" cried Tavia. "There never *was* a girl who deserved corporal punishment."

"Not even Nita Brandt?" suggested Dorothy, naming a girl who had ever been a thorn in the flesh for Tavia during their days at Glenwood.

"Well—perhaps *she*. But Nita's about the only one, I guess."

The next moment Tavia started to run down the long platform, dropping her bag and screaming:

"Jennie Hapgood! Jennie Jane Jemina Jerusha Happiness—*good!* How ever came you here?"

Dorothy was excited, too, when she saw the pretty girl whom Tavia greeted with such ebullition; but she looked beyond Jennie Hapgood, the expected guest from Pennsylvania.

There was the boys' new car beside the station platform and Ned was under the steering-wheel while Nat was just getting out after Jennie. Of course, the two girls just back from New York were warmly kissed by Jennie. Then Nat came next and before Tavia realized what was being done to her, she was soundly kissed, too!

"Bold, bad thing!" she cried, raising a gloved hand toward the laughing Nat. But it never reached him. Then Dorothy had to submit—as she always did—to the bearlike hugs of both her cousins, for Ned quickly joined them on the platform. Tavia escaped Ned—if, indeed, he had intended to follow his brother's example.

"What is the use of having a pretty cousin," the White boys always said, "if we can't kiss her? Keeps our hands in, you know. And if she has pretty friends, why shouldn't we kiss them, too?"

"Did you boys kiss Jennie when she arrived this morning?" Tavia demanded, repairing the ruffled hair that had fallen over her ears.

"Certainly!" declared Nat, boldly. "Both of us."

"They never!" cried Jennie, turning very red. "You know I wouldn't let these boys kiss me."

"I bet a boy kissed you the last thing before you started up here from home," teased Nat.

"I *never* let boys kiss me," repeated Jennie.

"Oh, no!" drawled Ned, joining in with his brother. "How about Jack?"

"Oh, well, *Jack!*"

"Jack isn't a boy, I suppose?" hooted Nat. "I guess that girl he's going to marry about Christmas time thinks he's a pretty nice boy."

"But he's only my brother," announced Jennie Hapgood, tossing her head.

"Is he really?" cried Tavia, clasping her hands eagerly.

"Is he really my brother?" demanded Jennie, in amazement. "Why, you *know* he is, Tavia Travers!"

"Oh, no! I mean are they going to be married at Christmas?"

"Yes. That is the plan now. And you've all got to come to Sunnyside to the wedding. Nothing less would suit Jack—or father and mother," Jennie said happily. "So prepare accordingly."

Nat raced with Tavia for the bag she had dropped. He got it and clung to it all the way in the car to The Cedars, threatening to open it and examine its contents.

"For I know very well that Tavia's got oodles of new face powder and rouge, and a rabbit's foot to put it on with—or else a kalsomine brush," Nat

declared. "Joe and Roger want to paint the old pigeon house, anyway, and this stuff Tavia's got in here will be just the thing."

In fact, the two big fellows were so glad to see their cousin and Tavia again that they teased worse than ever. A queer way to show their affection, but a boy's way, after all. And, of course, everybody else at the Cedars was delighted to greet Dorothy and Tavia. It was some time before the returned travelers could run upstairs to change their dresses for dinner. Jennie had gone into her room to change, too, and Tavia came to Dorothy's open door.

"Oh, that letter!" she exclaimed, seeing Dorothy standing very gravely with a letter in her hand. "Haven't you sent it?"

"You see I haven't," Dorothy said seriously.

"But why not?"

"It seems such a bold thing to do," confessed her friend. "We know so little about him. And it might encourage him to write in return——"

"Of course it will!" laughed Tavia.

"There! that's what I mean. It is bold."

"But, you silly!" cried Tavia. "You only write Mr. Knapp to do him a good turn. And he did us a good turn—at least, he did *me* one that I shall never forget."

"True," Dorothy said thoughtfully. "And I have only repeated to him in this note what I

heard that man, Stiffbold, say about the purchase of Mr. Knapp's ranch."

"Oh, help the poor fellow out. Those men will rob him," Tavia advised. "Why didn't you send it at once, when you had written it?"

"I—I thought I'd wait and consult Aunt Winnie," stammered Dorothy.

"Then consult her."

"But—but *now* I don't want to."

Tavia looked at her with certainty in her own gaze. "I know what is the matter with you," she said.

Dorothy flushed quickly and Tavia shook her head, saying nothing more. But when the girls went downstairs to dinner, Tavia saw Dorothy drop the stamped letter addressed to "Mr. Garford Knapp, Desert City," into the mail bag in the hall.

CHAPTER XII

UNCERTAINTIES

DOROTHY had no time before dinner, but after that meal she seized upon her brothers, Joe and Roger, and led them aside. The boys thought she had something nice for them, brought from New York. They very quickly found out their mistake.

"I want to know what you boys mean by taking such risks as you did this afternoon?" she demanded, when out of hearing of the rest of the family. She would not have her aunt or the major troubled by knowing of the escapade.

"You, especially, Joe," she went on, with an accusing finger raised. "You both might have been killed. *Then* how would you have felt?"

"Er—dead, I guess, Sister," admitted Roger, for Joe was silent.

"Didn't you know the road was closed because of repairs on the bridge?" she asked the older boy sternly.

"No-o. We forgot. We didn't go over to the nutting woods that way. Say! who told you?" blurted out Joe.

"Who told me what?"

"About our race with the train. Cricky, but it was great!"

"It was fine!" Roger added his testimony with equal enthusiasm.

"I saw you," said Dorothy, her face paling as she remembered her fright in the train. "I—I thought I should faint I was so frightened."

"Say! isn't that just like a girl?" grumbled Joe; but he looked at his sister with some compunction, for he and Roger almost worshipped her. Only, of course, they were boys and the usual boy cannot understand the fluttering terror in the usual girl's heart when danger threatens. Not that Dorothy was a weakling in any way; she could be courageous for herself. But her fears were always excited when those she loved were in peril.

"Why, we were only having fun, Sister," Roger blurted out. Being considerably younger than his brother he was quicker to be moved by Dorothy's expression of feeling.

"Fun!" she gasped.

"Yes," Joe said sturdily. "It was a great race. And you and Tavia were in that train? We didn't have an idea, did we, Roger?"

"Nop," said his small brother thoughtlessly. "If we had we wouldn't have raced *that* train."

"Now, I want to tell you something!" exclaimed their sister, with a sharper note in her

voice. "You're not to race *any* train! Understand, boys? Suppose that engine had struck you as you crossed the tracks?"

"Oh, it wouldn't," Joe said stoutly. "I know the engineer. He's a friend of mine. He saw I had the 'right-of-way,' as they call it. I'd beat him down the hill; so he held up the train."

"Yes—he held up the train," said Dorothy with a queer little laugh. "He put on brakes because I pulled the emergency cord. You boys would never have crossed ahead of that train if I hadn't done so."

"Oh, Dorothy!" gasped Joe.

"Oh, Sister!" cried Roger.

"Tavia and I almost had heart disease," the young woman told them seriously. "Engineers do not watch boys on country roads when they are guiding a great express train. It is a serious matter to control a train and to have the destinies of the passengers in one's hands. The engineer is looking ahead—watching the rails and the roadbed. Remember that, boys."

"I'd like to be an engineer!" sighed Roger, his eyes big with longing.

"Pooh!" Joe said. "It's more fun to drive an automobile—like this new one Ned and Nat have. You don't have to stay on the tracks, you know."

"Nobody but cautious people can learn to drive automobiles," said Dorothy, seriously.

"I'm big enough," stated Joe, with conviction.

"You may be. But you're not careful enough," his sister told him. "Your racing our train today showed that. Now, I won't tell father or auntie, for I do not wish to worry them. But you must promise me not to ride down that hill in your little wagon any more or enter into any such reckless sports."

"Oh, we won't, of course, if you say not, Dorothy," sniffed Joe. "But you must remember we're boys and boys have got to take chances. Even father says that."

"Yes. When you are grown. You may be placed in situations where your courage will be tested. But, goodness me!" finished Dorothy Dale. "Don't scare us to death, boys. And now see what I bought you in New York."

However, her lecture made some impression upon the boys' minds despite their excitement over the presents which were now brought to light. Full football outfits for both the present was, and Joe and Roger were delighted. They wanted to put them on and go out at once with the ball to "pass signals," dark as it had become.

However, they compromised on this at Dorothy's advice, by taking the suits, pads and guards off to their room and trying them on, coming downstairs later to "show off" before the folks in the drawing-room.

Major Dale was one of those men who never grow old in their hearts. Crippled as he was—both by his wounded leg and by rheumatism—he delighted to see the young life about him, and took as much interest in the affairs of the young people as ever he had.

Aunt Winnie looked a very interesting invalid, indeed, with her lame ankle, and rested on the couch. The big boys and Dorothy and her friends always made much of Aunt Winnie in any case; now that she was "laid up in drydock," as Nat expressed it, they were especially attentive.

Jennie and Tavia, with the two older boys, spent most of the evening hovering about the lady's couch, or at the piano where they played and sang college songs and old Briarwood songs, till eleven o'clock. Dorothy sat between her father and Aunt Winnie and talked to them.

"What makes you so sober, Captain?" the major asked during the evening. He had always called her "his little captain" and sometimes seemed really to forget that she had any other name.

"I'm all right, Major," she returned brightly. "I have to think, sometimes, you know."

"What is the serious problem now, Dorothy?" asked her aunt, with a little laugh. "Did you forget to buy something while you were in New York?"

Dorothy dimpled. "Wait till you see all I did buy," she responded, "and you will not ask that question. I have been the most reckless person!"

"Why the serious pucker to your brow, Captain?" went on the major.

"Oh, I have problems. I admit the fact," Dorothy said, trying to laugh off their questioning.

"Out with them," advised her father. "Here are two old folks who have been solving problems all their lives. Maybe we can help."

Dorothy laughed again. "Try this one," she said, with her eyes upon the quartette "harmonizing" at the piano in dulcet tones, singing "Seeing Nellie Ho-o-ome." "Which of our big boys does Tavia like best?"

"Goodness!" exclaimed her aunt, while the major chuckled mellowly. "Don't you know, really, Dorothy? I was going to ask *you*. I thought, of course, Tavia confided everything to you."

"Sooner or later she may," the young woman said, still with the thoughtful air upon her. "But I am as much in the dark about this query as anybody—perhaps as the boys themselves."

"Humph!" muttered the major. "Which of them likes *her* the better?"

"And *that* I'd like to know," said his sister earnestly. "There is another thing, Dorothy: Which of my sons is destined to fall in love with

this very, very pretty girl you have invited here—Jennie Hapgood, I mean?"

"Oh! they're all doing it, are they?" grunted the major. "How about our Dorothy? Where does she come in? No mate for her?"

"I think I shall probably become an old maid," Dorothy Dale said, but with a conscious flush that made her aunt watch her in a puzzled way for some time.

But the major put back his head and laughed delightedly. "No more chance of your remaining a spinster—when you are really old enough to be called one—than there is of my leading troops into battle again," he declared with warmth. "Hey, Sister?"

"Our Dorothy is too attractive I am sure to escape the chance to marry, at least," said Aunt Winnie, still watching her niece with clouded gaze. "I wonder whence the right knight will come riding—from north, or south, east or west?"

And in spite of herself Dorothy flushed up again at her aunt's last word.

It was a question oft-repeated in Dorothy Dale's mind during the following days, this one regarding the state of mind of her two cousins and her two school friends.

It had always seemed to Dorothy, whenever she had thought of it, that one of her cousins, either Ned or Nat, must in the end be preferred

by Tavia. To think of Tavia's really settling down to caring for any other man than Ned or Nat, was quite impossible.

On the other hand, the boys had both shown a great fondness for the society of Jennie Hapgood when they were all at her home in Pennsylvania such a short time previous; and now that all four were together again Dorothy could not guess "which was which" as Tavia herself would have said.

The boys did not allow Dorothy to be overlooked in any particular. She was not neglected in the least; yet she did, as the days passed, find more time to spend with her father and with her Aunt Winnie.

"The little captain is getting more thoughtful. She is steadying down," the major told Mrs. White.

"But I wonder *why?*" was that good woman's puzzled response.

Dorothy Dale sitting by herself with a book that she was not reading or with fancywork on which she only occasionally took stitches, was entirely out of her character. She had never been this way before going to New York, Mrs. White was sure.

There were several uncertainties upon the girl's mind. One of them almost came to light when, after ten days, her letter addressed to "Mr. Gar-

ford Knapp, Desert City," was returned to her by the post-office department, as instructed in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope.

Her letter, warning Garry Knapp of the advantage the real estate men wished to take of him, would, after all, do him no good. He would never know that she had written. Perhaps her path and Garry Knapp's would never cross again.

CHAPTER XIII

DOROTHY MAKES A DISCOVERY

THE boys had a dog—Old Brindle he was called—and he had just enough bull in him to make him a faithful friend and a good watchdog. But, of course, he was of little use in the woods, and Joe and Roger were always begging for a hunting dog.

"We've got these now—pump-rifles," Roger said eagerly to Dorothy, whom he thought able to accomplish any wonder she might undertake. "They shoot fifty shots. Think of it, Sister! That's a lot. And father taught us how to use 'em long ago, of course. Just think! I could stand right up and shoot down fifty people—just like that."

"Oh, Roger!" gasped Dorothy. "Don't say such awful things."

"Oh, I wouldn't, you know; but I could," the boy said confidently. "Now the law is off rabbits and partridges and quail. Joe and I saw lots of 'em when we went after those nuts the other day. If we'd had our guns along maybe we might have shot some."

"The poor little birds and the cunning little rabbits," said Dorothy with a sigh.

"Oh! they're not like our pigeons and our tame rabbits. These are real *wild*. If some of 'em weren't shot they'd breed an' breed till there were so many that maybe it wouldn't be safe to go out into the woods," declared the small boy, whose imagination never needed spurring.

Joe came up on the porch in time to hear this last. He chuckled, but Dorothy was saying to Roger:

"How foolish, dear! Who ever heard of a rabbit being cross?"

"Just the same I guess you've heard of being as 'mad as a March hare,' haven't you?" demanded Joe, his eyes twinkling. "And we *do* want a bird dog, Sis, to jump a rabbit for us, or to flush a flock of quail."

"Those dear little bobwhites," Dorothy sighed again. "Why is it that boys want always to kill?"

"So's to eat," Joe said bluntly. "You know yourself, Dorothy Dale, that you like partridge on toast and rabbit stew."

She laughed at them. "I shall go hungry, then, I'm afraid, as far as you boys are concerned."

"Of course we can't get any game if we don't have a dog. Brindle couldn't jump a flea," growled Joe.

"Say! the big fellows used to have lots more

pets than we've got," complained Roger, referring to Ned and Nat.

"*They* had dogs," added Joe. "A whole raft of 'em."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I'll see what can be done. But another dog!"

"We won't let him bite you, Sister," proclaimed Roger. "We only want him to chase rabbits or to start up the birds so we can shoot 'em."

Dorothy's "I'll see" was, of course, taken by the boys themselves as an out-and-out agreement to do as the boys desired. They were convinced that if she gave her mind to it their sister could perform almost any miracle. At least, she could always bring the rest of the family around to her way of thinking.

Ned and Nat had opposed the bringing of another dog upon the place. They were fond of old Brindle; but it must be confessed that the watchdog was bad tempered where other dogs were concerned.

Brindle seldom went off the place; but if he saw any other dog trespassing he was very apt to fly at the uninvited visitor. And once the bull's teeth were clinched in the strange animal's neck, it took a hot iron to make him loose his hold.

There had been several such unfortunate happenings, and Mrs. White had paid several owners of dogs damages rather than have trouble

with the neighbors. She—and even the major—had strong objections to the coming of any other dog upon the place as long as Brindle lived.

So the chance for Joe and Roger to have their request granted was small indeed. Nevertheless, "hope springs eternal," especially in the breast of a small boy who wants a dog.

"Maybe we can find somebody that's got a good, trained dog and will sell him to us, Roger," Joe said, as they set forth from the house.

"But I haven't got much money—only what's in the bank, and I can't get that," complained Roger.

"You spend all you get for candy," scoffed Joe. "Now, *I've* got a whole half dollar left of my month's spending money. But you can't buy much of a dog for fifty cents."

"Maybe somebody would give us a dog."

"And folks don't give away good dogs, either," grumbled Joe.

"I tell you!" exclaimed Roger, suddenly. "I saw a stray dog yesterday going down the lane behind our stables."

"How do you know it was a stray dog?"

"'Cause it *looked* so. It was sneaking along at the edge of the hedge and it was tired looking. Then, it had a piece of frayed rope tied around its neck. Oh, it was a stray dog all right," declared the smaller boy eagerly.

"Where'd it go to?"

"Under Mr. Cummerford's barn," said Roger. "I bet we could coax it out, if it's still there."

"Not likely," grunted Joe.

Nevertheless, he started off at once in the direction indicated by his brother, and the boys were soon at the stable of the neighbor whose place adjoined The Cedars on that side.

Oddly enough, the dog was still there. He had crawled out and lay in the sun beside the barn. He was emaciated, his eyes were red and rolling, and he had a lame front paw. The gray, frayed rope was still tied to his neck. He was a regular tramp dog.

But he allowed the boys to come close to him without making any attempt to get away. He eyed them closely, but neither growled nor wagged his tail. He was a "funny acting" dog, as Roger said.

"I bet he hasn't had anything to eat for so long and he's come so far that he hasn't got the spunk to wag his tail," Joe said, as eager as Roger now. "We'll take him home and feed him."

"He's sure a stray dog, isn't he, Joe?" cried the smaller boy. "I haven't ever seen him before around here, have you?"

"No. And I bet his owner won't ever come after him," said Joe, picking up the end of the rope. "He's just the kind of a dog we want, too.

You see, he's a bird dog, or something like that. And when he's fed up and rested, I bet he'll know just how to go after partridges."

He urged the strange dog to his feet. The beast tottered, and would have lain down again. Roger, the tender-hearted, said:

"Oh! he's so hungry. Bet he hasn't had a thing to eat for days. Maybe we'll have to carry him."

"No. He's too dirty to carry," Joe said, looking at the mud caked upon the long hair of the poor creature and the dust upon him. "We'll get him to the stable and feed him; then we'll hose him off."

Pulling at the rope he urged the dog on. The animal staggered at first, but finally grew firmer on his legs. But he did not use the injured fore paw. He favored that as he hopped along to the White stables. Neither the coachman nor the chauffeur were about. There was nobody to observe the dog or advise the boys about the beast. Roger ran to the kitchen door to beg some scraps for their new possession. The cook would always give Roger what he asked for. When he came back Joe got a pan of water for the dog; but the creature backed away from it and whined —the first sound he had made.

"Say! isn't that funny?" Joe demanded. "See! he won't drink. You'd think he'd be thirsty."

"Try him with this meat," Roger said. "Maybe he's too hungry to drink at first."

The dog was undoubtedly starving. Yet he turned his head away from the broken pieces of food Roger put down before his nose.

Joe had tied the rope to a ring on the side of the stable. The boys stepped back to see if the dog would eat or drink if they were not so close to him. Then it was that the creature flew into an awful spasm. He rose up, his eyes rolling, trembling in every limb, and trying to break the rope that fastened him to the barn. Froth flew from his clashing jaws. His teeth were terrible fangs. He fell, rolling over, snapping at the water-dish. The boys, even Joe, ran screaming from the spot.

At the moment Dorothy, Tavia and Jennie came walking down the path toward the stables. They heard the boys scream and all three started to run. Ned and Nat, nearer the house, saw the girls running and they likewise bounded down the sloping lawn.

Around the corner of the stables came Joe and Roger, the former almost dragging the smaller boy by the hand. And, almost at the same instant, appeared the dog, the broken rope trailing, bounding, snapping, rolling over, acting as insanely as ever a dog acted.

"Oh! what's the matter?" cried Dorothy.

"Keep away from that dog!" shrieked Tavia, stopping short and seizing both Dorothy and Jennie. "He's mad!"

The dog was blindly running, this way and that, the foam dripping from his clashing jaws. He was, indeed, a most fearful sight. He had no real intention in his savage charges, for a beast so afflicted with rabies loses eyesight as well as sense; but suddenly he bounded directly for the three girls.

They all shrieked in alarm, even Dorothy. Yet the latter the better held her self-possession than the others. She heard Jennie scream: "Oh, Ned!" while Tavia cried: "Oh, Nat!"

The young men were at the spot in a moment. Nat had picked up a croquet mallet and one good blow laid the poor dog out—harmless forever more.

Tavia had seized the rescuer's arm, Jennie was clinging to Ned. Dorothy, awake at last to the facts of the situation, made a great discovery—and almost laughed, serious as the peril had been.

"I believe I know which is which now," she thought, forgetting her alarm.

SUDDENLY HE BOUNDED DIRECTLY FOR THE THREE GIRLS.

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CHAPTER XIV

TAVIA IS DETERMINED

"AFTER that scare I'm afraid the boys will have to go without a bird dog," Tavia said that night as she and Dorothy were brushing their hair before the latter's dressing-glass.

Tavia and Jennie and Ned and Nat were almost inseparable during the daytime; but when the time came to retire the flyaway girl had to have an old-time "confab," as she expressed it, with her chum.

Dorothy was so bright and so busy all day long that nobody discovered—not even the major—that she was rather "out of it." The two couples of young folk sometimes ran away and left Dorothy busy at some domestic task in which she claimed to find much more interest than in the fun her friends and cousins were having.

"It would have been a terrible thing if the poor dog had bitten one of us," Dorothy replied. "Dr. Agnew, the veterinary, says without doubt it was afflicted with rabies."

"And how scared your Aunt Winnie was!" Then Tavia began to giggle. "She will be so

afraid of anything that barks now, that she'll want all the trees cut down around the house."

"That pun is unworthy of you, my dear," Dorothy said placidly.

"Dear me, Doro Doodlekins!" exclaimed Tavia, suddenly and affectionately, coming close to her chum and kissing her warmly. "You are such a tabby-cat all of a sudden. Why! *you* have grown up, while the rest of us are only kids."

"Yes; I am very settled," observed Dorothy, smiling into the mirror at her friend. "A cap for me and knitting very soon, Tavia. Then I shall sit in the chimney corner and think——"

"Think about whom, my dear?" Tavia asked saucily. "That Garry Knapp, I bet."

"I wouldn't *bet,*" sighed Dorothy. "It isn't ladylike."

"Oh—de-ah—me!" groaned Tavia. "You are thinking of him just the same."

"I happened to be just now," admitted Dorothy, and without blushing this time.

"No! were you really?" demanded Tavia, eagerly. "Isn't it funny he doesn't write?"

"No. Not at all."

"But you'd think he would write and thank you for your letter if nothing more," urged the argumentative Tavia.

"No," said Dorothy again.

"Why not?"

"Because Mr. Knapp never got my letter," Dorothy said, opening her bureau drawer and pulling the letter out from under some things laid there. "See. It was returned to-day."

"Oh, Dorothy!" gasped Tavia, both startled and troubled.

"Yes. It—it didn't reach him somehow," Dorothy said, and she could not keep the trouble entirely out of her voice.

"Oh, my *dear!*" repeated Tavia.

"And I am sorry," her friend went on to say; "for now he will not know about the intentions of those men, Stiffbold and Lightly."

"But, goodness! it serves him right," exclaimed Tavia, suddenly. "He didn't give us his right address."

"He gave us no address," said Dorothy, sadly.

"Why, yes! he said Desert City——"

"He mentioned that place and said that his land was somewhere near there. But he works on a ranch, which, perhaps, is a long way from Desert City."

"That's so," grumbled Tavia. "I forgot he's only a cowboy."

At this Dorothy flushed a little and Tavia, looking at her sideways and eagerly, noted the flush. Her eyes danced for a moment, for the girl was naturally chock-full of mischief.

But in a moment the expression of Tavia Trav-

er's face changed. Dorothy was pensively gazing in the glass; she had halted in her hair brushing, and Tavia knew that her chum neither saw her own reflection nor anything else pictured in the mirror. The mirror of her mind held Dorothy's attention, and Tavia could easily guess the vision there. A tall, broad-shouldered, broad-hatted young man with a frank and handsome face and a ready smile that dimpled one bronzed cheek ever so little and wrinkled the outer corners of his clear, far-seeing eyes.

Garry Knapp!

Tavia for the first time realized that Dorothy had found interest and evidently a deep and abiding interest, in the young stranger from Desert City. It rather shocked her. Dorothy, of all persons, to become so very deeply interested in a man about whom they knew practically nothing.

Tavia suddenly realized that she knew more about him than Dorothy did. At least, she had been with Garry Knapp more than had her friend. It was Tavia who had had the two hours' tête-à-tête with the Westerner at dinner on the evening before Garry Knapp departed so suddenly for the West. All that happened and was said at that dinner suddenly unrolled like a panorama before Tavia's memory.

Why! she could picture it all plainly. She had been highly delighted herself in the recovery of

her bag and in listening to Garry's story of how it had been returned by the cash-girl's sister. And, of course, she had been pleased to be dining alone with a fine looking young man in a hotel dining-room. She had rattled on when her turn came to talk, just as irresponsibly as usual.

Now, in thinking over the occasion, she realized that the young man from the West had been a shrewd questioner. He had got her started upon Dorothy Dale, and before they came to the little cups of black coffee Tavia had told just about all she knew regarding her chum.

The reader may be sure that all Tavia said was to Dorothy's glory. She had little need to explain to Garry Knapp what a beautiful character Dorothy Dale possessed. Tavia had told about Dorothy's family, her Aunt Winnie's wealth, the fortunes Major Dale now possessed both in the East and West, and the fact that when Dorothy came of age, at twenty-one, she would be wealthy in her own right. She had said all this to a young man who was struggling along as a cowpuncher on a Western ranch, and whose patrimony was a piece of rundown land that he could sell but for a song, as he admitted himself. "And no chorus to it!" Tavia thought.

"I'm a bonehead!" she suddenly thought fiercely. "Nat would say my noodle is solid ivory. I know now what was the matter with Garry

Knapp that evening. I know why he rushed up to me and asked for Dorothy, and was what the novelists call 'distrait' during our dinner. Oh, what a worm I am! A miserable, squirmy worm! Ugh!" and the conscience-stricken girl fairly shuddered at her own reflection in the mirror and turned away quickly so that Dorothy should not see her features.

"It's—it's the most *wonderful* thing. And it began right under my nose, my poor little 're-trousered' nose, as Joe called it the other day, and I didn't really see it! I thought it was just a fancy on Dorothy's part! And I never thought of Garry Knapp's side of it at all! Oh, my heaven!" groaned Tavia, deep in her own soul. "Why wasn't I born with some good sense instead of good looks? I—I've spoiled my chum's life, perhaps. Goodness! it can't be so bad as that.

"Of course, Garry Knapp is just the sort of fellow who would raise a barrier of Dorothy's riches between them. Goodness me!" added the practical Tavia, "I'd like to see any barrier of wealth stop *me* if I wanted a man. I'd shin the wall in a hurry so as to be on the same side of it as he was."

She would have laughed at this fancy had she not taken a look at Dorothy's face again.

"Good-night!" she shouted into her chum's ear, hugged her tight, kissed her loudly, and ran away

into her own room. Once there, she cried all the time she was disrobing, getting into her lacy night-gown, and pulling down the bedclothes.

Then she did not immediately go to bed. Instead, she tiptoed back to the connecting door and closed it softly. She turned on the hanging electric light over the desk.

"I'll do it!" she said, with determined mien. "I'll write to Lance Petterby." And she did so.

CHAPTER XV

THE SLIDE ON SNAKE HILL

Joe and Roger marched down at an early breakfast hour from the upper regions of the big white house, singing energetically if not melodiously a pæn of joy:

" 'The frog he would a-wooing go— —
Bully for you! Bully for all!
The frog he would a-wooing go——
Bully for all, we say!' "

The boys' determination to reach the low register of a bullfrog in that "bully for all" line was very, very funny, especially in Roger's case, for his speaking voice was naturally a shrill treble.

Their joy, however, awoke any sleepers there might have been in the house, and most of them came to their bedroom doors and peered out.

"What's the matter with you blamed little rascals?" Ned, in a purple bathrobe, demanded.

"Wouldn't you boys just as lief sing as to make that noise?" Nat, in a gray robe, and at his door, questioned.

But he grinned at his small cousins, for it hadn't been so long ago that he was just as much of a boy as they were.

"Hello, kids!" cried Tavia, sticking out a tousseled head from her room. "Tell us: What's the good news?"

Jennie Hapgod peered out for an instant, saw Ned and Nat, and darted back with an exclamatory "Oh!"

"I—I thought something had happened," she faintly said, closing her door all but a crack.

"Something has," declared Joe.

"What is it, boys?" asked Dorothy, appearing fully dressed from her room. "The ice?"

"What ice?" demanded Tavia. "Has the iceman come so early? Tell him to leave a big ten-cent piece."

"Huh!" grunted Roger, "there's a whole lot more than a ten-cent piece outside, and you'd see it if you'd put up your shade. The whole world's ice-covered."

"So it is," Joe agreed.

"There was rain last evening, you know," Dorothy said, starting down the lower flight of stairs briskly. "And then it turned very cold. Everything is sheathed in ice out-of-doors. Doesn't the warm air from the registers feel nice? I *do* love dry heat, even if it is more expensive."

"Bully!" roared Nat, who had darted back to

run up the shade at one of the windows in his room. "Look out, girls! it's great."

Every twig on every bush and tree and every fence rail and post were covered with glistening ice. The sun, just rising red and rosy as though he had but now come from a vigorous morning bath, threw his rays in profusion over this fairy world and made a most spectacular scene for the young people to look out upon. In an hour all of them were out of doors to enjoy the spectacle in a "close up," as Tavia called it.

"And we all ought to have spectacles!" she exclaimed a little later. "This glare is blinding, and we'll all have blinky, squinty eyes by night."

"Automobile goggles—for all hands!" exclaimed Nat. "They're all smoked glasses, too. I'll get 'em," and he started for the garage.

"But no automobile to-day," laughed Jennie. "Think of the skidding on this sheet of ice." For the ground was sheathed by Jack Frost, as well as the trees and bushes and fences.

Joe and Roger, well wrapped up, were just starting from the back door and Dorothy hailed them:

"Where away, my hearties? Ahoy!"

"Aw—we're just going sliding," said Roger, stuttering.

"Where?" demanded the determined older sister.

"Snake Hill," said Joe, shortly. He loved Dorothy; but this having girls "butting in" all the time frayed his manly patience.

"Take care and don't get hurt, boys!" called Tavia, roguishly, knowing well that the sisterly advice was on the tip of Dorothy's tongue and that it would infuriate the small boys.

"Aw, you——"

Joe did not get any farther, for Nat in passing gave him a look. But he shrugged his shoulders and went on with Roger without replying to Tavia's advice.

"Oh, what fun!" cried Jennie Hapgood, suddenly. "Couldn't *we* go coasting?"

"Sure we could," Ned agreed instantly. Lately he seemed to agree with anything Jennie said and that without question.

"Tobogganing—oh, my!" cried Tavia, quick to seize upon a new scheme for excitement and fun. Then she turned suddenly serious and added: "If Dorothy will go. Not otherwise."

Dorothy laughed at her openly. "Why not, Tavia?" she demanded. "Are you afraid to trust the boys unless I'm along? I know they are awful cut-ups."

"I feel that Jennie and I should be more carefully chaperoned," Tavia declared with serious lips but twinkling eyes.

"Oh! *Oh!* OH!" in crescendo from Nat, re-

turning in time to hear this. "Who needs a 'bag o' bones'—— Excuse me! 'Chaperon,' I mean? What's afoot?"

Just then he slipped on the glare ice at the foot of the porch steps and went down with a crash.

"You're not, old man," cried Ned as the girls squealed. "I hope you have your shock-absorbers on. That was a jim-dandy!"

"Did—did it hurt you, Nat?" begged Tavia, with clasped hands.

"Oh-ugh!" grunted Nat, gingerly arising and examining the handful of goggles he carried to see if they were all right. "Every bone in my body is broken. Gee! that was some smash."

"Do it again, dear," Ned teased. "Your mother didn't happen to see you and she's at the window now."

"Aw, you go fish!" retorted the younger brother, for his dignity was hurt if nothing else. "Wish it had been you."

"So do I," sighed Ned. "I'd have done it so much more gracefully. You see, practice in the tango and foxtrot, not to mention other and more intricate dance steps, *does* help one. And you never would give proper attention to your dancing, Sonny."

"Here!" threatened Nat. "I'll dance one of my fists off your ear——"

"I shall have to part you boys," broke in Doro-

thy. "Threatening each other with corporal punishment—and before the ladies."

"Why," declared Ned, hugging his brother in a bearlike hug as Nat reached his level on the porch. "He can beat me to death if he likes, the dear little thing! Come on, 'Thaniel. What do you say to giving the girls a slide?"

"Heh?" ejaculated Nat. "What do you want to let 'em slide for? Got sick of 'em so quick? Where are your manners?"

"Oh, Ned!" groaned Tavia. "Don't you want us hanging around any more?"

"I am surprised at Mr. Edward," Jennie joined in.

"Gee, Edward," said Nat, grinning, "but you do put your foot in your mouth every time you open it."

Dorothy laughed at them all, but made no comment. Despite her late seriousness she was jolly enough when she was one of the party. And she agreed to be one to-day.

It was decided to get out Nat's old "double-ripper," see that it was all right, and at once start for Snake Hill, where the smaller boys had already gone.

"For this sun is going to melt the ice a good deal by noon. Of course, it will be only a short cold snap this time of year," Dorothy said, with her usual practical sense.

They were some time in setting out, and it was not because the girls "prinked," as Tavia pointed out.

"I'd have you know we have been waiting five whole minutes," she proclaimed when Ned and Nat drew the long, rusty-ironed, double-ripper sled out of the barn. "For once you boys cannot complain."

"Those kids had been trying to use this big sled, I declare," Nat said. "And I had to find a couple of new bolts. Don't want to break down on the hill and spill you girls."

"That would be spilling the beans for fair," Ned put in. "Oh, beg pardon! Be-ings, I mean. Get aboard, beautiful beings, and we'll drag you to the foot of the hill."

They went on down the back road and into the woods with much merriment. The foot of Snake Hill was a mile and a half from The Cedars. Part of the hill was rough and wild, and there was not a farm upon its side anywhere.

"I wonder where the kids are making their slide?" said Tavia, easily.

"That's why I am glad we came this way," Dorothy confessed. "They might be tempted to slide down on this steep side, instead of going over to the Washington Village road. *That's* smooth."

"Trust the boys for finding the most danger-

ous place," Jennie Hapgood remarked. "I never saw their like."

"That's because you only have an older brother," said Dorothy, wisely. "He was past his reckless age while you were still in pinafores and pigtails."

"Reckless age!" scoffed Tavia. "When does a boy or a man ever cease to be reckless?"

"Right-oh!" agreed Nat, looking back along the tow-line of the sled. "See how he forever puts himself within the danger zone of pretty girls. Gee! but Ned and I are a reckless team! What say, Neddie?"

"I say do your share of the pulling," returned his brother. "Those girls are no feather-weights, and this is up hill."

"Oh, to be so insulted!" murmured Tavia. "To accuse us of bearing extra flesh about with us when we all follow Lovely Lucy Larriper's directions, given in the *Evening Bazoo*. Not a pound of the superfluous do we carry."

"Dorothy's getting chunky," announced Nat, wickedly.

"You're another!" cried Tavia, standing up for her chum. "Her lovely curves are to be praised—oh!"

At that moment the young men ran the runners on one side of the sled over an ice-covered stump, and the girls all joined in Tavia's scream. If there

had not been handholds they would all three have been ignominiously dumped off.

"Pardon, ladies! Watch your step!" Ned said. "And don't get us confused with your beauty-talks' business. Besides, it isn't really modest. I always blush myself when I inadvertently turn over to the woman's page of the evening paper. It is a delicate place for mere man to tread."

"Hoo-ray!" ejaculated his brother, making a false step himself just then. "Wish I had creepers on. *This* is a mighty delicate place for a fellow to tread, too, my boy."

In fact, they soon had to order the girls off the sled. The way was becoming too steep and the side of the hill was just as slick as the highway had been.

With much laughter and not a few terrified "squawks," to quote Tavia, the girls scrambled up the slope after the boys and the sled. Suddenly piercing screams came from above them.

"Those rascals!" ejaculated Ned.

"Oh! they *are* sliding on this side," cried Dorothy. "Stop them, Ned! Please, Nat!"

"What do you expect us to do?" demanded the latter. "Run out and catch 'em with our bare hands?"

They had come to a break in the path now and could see out over the sloping pasture in which the boys had been sliding for an hour. Their sled

had worked a plain path down the hill; but at the foot of it was an abrupt drop over the side of a gully. Dorothy Dale—and her cousins, too—knew that gully very well. There was a cave in it, and in and about that cave they had once had some very exciting adventures.

Joe and Roger had selected the smoothest part of the pasture to coast in, it was true; but the party of young folk just arrived could see that it was a very dangerous place as well. At the foot of the slide was a little bank overhanging the gully. The smaller boys had been stopping their sled right on the brink, and with a jolt, for the watchers could see Joe's heelprints in the ground where the ice had been broken away.

They could hear the boys screaming out a school song at the top of the hill. Ned and Nat roared a command to Joe and Roger to halt in their mad career; but the two smaller boys were making so much noise that it was evident their cousins' shout was not heard by them.

They came down, Joe sitting ahead on the sled with his brother hanging on behind, the feet of the boy sitting in front thrust out to halt the sled. But if the sled should jump over the barrier, the two reckless boys would fall twenty feet to the bottom of the gully.

"Stop them, do!" groaned Jennie Hapgood, who was a timid girl.

It was Dorothy who looked again at the little mound on the edge of gully's bank. The frost had got into the earth there, for it had been freezing weather for several days before the ice storm of the previous night. Now the sun was shining full on the spot, and she could see where the boys' feet, colliding with that lump of earth on the verge of the declivity, had knocked off the ice and bared the earth completely. There was, too, a long crack along the edge of the slight precipice.

"Oh, boys!" she called to Ned and Nat, who were struggling up the hill once more, "stop them, do! You must! That bank is crumbling away. If they come smashing down upon it again they may go over the brink, sled and all!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLY IN THE AMBER

"Oh, Dorothy!" cried Tavia.

Jennie, with a shudder, buried her face in her hands.

Joe and Roger Dale were fairly flying down the hill, and would endeavor to stop by collision with the same lump of frozen earth that had previously been their bulwark.

"See! Ned! Nat!" cried Dorothy again. "We must stop them!"

But how stop the boys already rushing down hill on their coaster? It seemed an impossible feat.

The White brothers dropped the towline of the big sled and scrambled along the slippery slope toward the edge of the gully.

With a whoop of delight the two smaller boys, on their red coaster, whisked past the girls.

"Stop them!" shrieked the three in chorus.

Ned reached the edge of the gully bank first. His weight upon the cracking earth sent the slight barrier crashing over the brink. Just as they had supposed there was not a possible chance of Joe's

stopping the sled when it came down to this perilous spot.

Tavia groaned and wrung her hands. Jennie burst out crying. Dorothy knew she could not help, yet she staggered after Ned and Nat, unable to remain inactive like the other girls.

Ned recovered himself from the slippery edge of the bank; but by a hair's breadth only was he saved from being thrown to the bottom of the gully. He crossed the slide in a bound and whirled swiftly, gesturing to his brother to stay back. Nat understood and stopped abruptly.

"You grab Roger—I'll take Joe!" panted Ned.

Just then the smaller boys on the sled rushed down upon them. Fortunately, the steeper part of the hill ended some rods back from the gully's edge. But the momentum the coaster had gained brought it and its burden of surprised and yelling boys at a very swift pace, indeed, down to the point where Ned and Nat stood bracing themselves upon the icy ground.

"Oh, boys!" shrieked Tavia, without understanding what Ned and Nat hoped to accomplish. *"Do something!"*

And the very next instant they did!

The coaster came shooting down to the verge of the gully bank. Joe Dale saw that the bank had given way and he could not stop the sled. Nor did he dare try to swerve it to one side.

Ned and Nat, staring at the imperilled coasters, saw the look of fear come into Joe's face. Ned shouted:

"Let go all holds! We'll grab you! Quick!"

Joe was a quick-minded boy after all. He was holding the steering lines. Roger was clinging to his shoulders. If Joe dropped the lines, both boys would be free of the sled.

That is what he did. Ned swooped and grabbed Joe. Nat seized upon the shrieking and surprised Roger. The sled darted out from beneath the two boys and shot over the verge of the bank, landing below in the gully with a crash among the icy branches of a tree.

"Wha—what did you do that for?" Roger demanded of Nat, as the latter set him firmly on his feet.

"Just for instance, kid," growled Nat. "We ought to have let you both go."

"And I guess we would if it hadn't been for Dorothy," added Ned, rising from where he had fallen with Joe on top of him.

"Cracky!" gasped Joe. "We'd have gone straight over that bank that time, wouldn't we? Gee, Roger! we'd have broken our necks!"

Even Roger was impressed by this stated fact. "Oh, Dorothy!" he cried, "isn't it lucky you happened along, so's to tell Ned and Nat what to do? I wouldn't care to have a broken neck."

"You are very right, kid," growled Nat. "It's Dorothy 'as does it'—always. She is the observant little lady who puts us wise to every danger. 'Who ran to catch me when I fell?' My cousin!"

"Hold your horses, son," advised his brother, with seriousness. "It was Dorothy who smelled out the danger all right."

"I do delight in the metaphors you boys use," broke in Dorothy. "I might be a beagle-hound, according to Ned. 'Smelled out,' indeed!"

"Aren't you horrid?" sighed Jennie, for they were all toiling up the hill again.

Ned put the cup of his hand under Jennie's elbow and helped her over a particularly glary spot. "Boys are very good folk," he said, smiling down into her pretty face, "if you take them just right. But they are explosive, of course."

Nat, likewise helping to drag the big sled, was walking beside Tavia. Dorothy looked from one couple to the other, smiled, and then found that her eyes were misty.

"Why!" she gasped under her breath, "I believe I am getting to be a sour old maid. I am jealous!"

She turned her attention to the smaller boys and they all went gaily up the hill. Nobody was going to discover that Dorothy Dale felt blue—not if she could possibly help it!

Over on the other side of the hill where the

smooth road lay the party had a wonderfully invigorating coasting time. They all piled upon the double-ripper—Joe and Roger, too—and after the first two or three slides, the runners became freed of rust and the heavy sled fairly flew.

"Oh! this is great—great!" cried Tavia. "It's just like flying. I always did want to fly up into the blue empyrean——"

They were then resting at the top of the hill. Nat turned over on his back upon the sled, struggled with all four limbs, and uttered a soul-searching: "Woof! woof! Ow-row-row! Woof!"

"Get up, silly!" ordered Tavia. "Whenever I have any flight of fancy *you* always make it fall flat."

"And if you tried a literal flight into the empyrean—ugh!—you'd fall flat without any help," declared Nat. "But we don't want you to fly away from us, Tavia. We couldn't get along without you."

" 'Thank you, kindly, sir, she said,' " responded his gay little friend.

However, Tavia and Nat could be serious on occasion. This very day as the party tramped home to luncheon, dragging the sleds, having recovered the one from the gully, they walked apart, and Dorothy noted they were preoccupied. But then, so were Ned and Jennie. Dorothy's eyes danced now. She had recovered her poise.

"It's great fun," she whispered to her aunt, when they were back in the house. "Watching people who are pairing off, I mean. I know 'which is which' all right now. And I guess you do, too, Aunt Winnie?"

Mrs. White nodded and smiled. There was nothing to fear regarding this intimacy between her big sons and Dorothy's pretty friends. Indeed, she could wish for no better thing to happen than that Ned and Nat should become interested in Tavia and Jennie.

"But you, my dear?" she asked Dorothy, slyly. "Hadn't we better be finding somebody for you to walk and talk with?"

"I must play chaperon," declared Dorothy, gaily. "No, no! I am going to be an old maid, I tell you, Auntie dear." And to herself she added: "But never a sour, disagreeable, jealous one! Never *that!*"

Not that in secret Dorothy did not have many heavy thoughts when she remembered Garry Knapp or anything connected with him.

"We must send those poor girls some Christmas remembrances," Dorothy said to Tavia, and Tavia understood whom she meant without having it explained to her.

"Of course we will," she cried. "You would not let me give Forty-seven and her sister as much money as I wanted to for finding my bag."

"No. I don't think it does any good to put a premium on honesty," Dorothy said gravely.

"Huh! that's just what Garry Knapp said," said Tavia, reflectively.

"But now," Dorothy hastened to add, "we can send them both at Christmas time something really worth while."

"Something warm to wear," said Tavia, more than ordinarily thoughtful. "They have to go through the cold streets to work in all weathers."

It seemed odd, but Dorothy noticed that her chum remained rather serious all that day. In the evening Nat came in with the mail bag and dumped its contents on the hall table. This was just before dinner and usually the cry of "Mail!" up the stairway brought most of the family into the big entrance hall.

Down tripped Tavia with the other girls; Ned lounged in from the library; Joe and Roger appeared, although they seldom had any letters, only funny postal cards from their old-time chums at Dalton and from local school friends.

Mrs. White took her mail off to her own room. She walked without her crutch now, but favored the lame ankle. Joe seized upon his father's mail and ran to find him.

Nat sorted the letters out swiftly. Everybody had a few. Suddenly he hesitated as he picked up a rather coarse envelope on which Tavia's

name was scrawled. In the upper left-hand corner was written: "L. Petterby."

"Great Peter!" he gasped, shooting a questioning glance at Tavia. "Does that cowpuncher write to you still?"

Perhaps there was something like an accusation in Nat's tone. At least, it was not just the tone to take with such a high-spirited person as Tavia. Her head came up and her eyes flashed. She reached for the letter.

"Isn't that nice!" she cried. "Another from dear old Lance. He's *such* a desperately determined chap."

At first the other young folk had not noted Nat's tone or Tavia's look. But the young man's next query all understood:

"Still at it, are you, Tavia? Can't possibly keep from stringing 'em along? It's meat and drink to you, isn't it?"

"Why, of course," drawled Tavia, two red spots in her cheeks.

She walked away, slitting Lance Petterby's envelope as she went. Nat's brow was clouded, and all through dinner he said very little. Tavia seemed livelier and more social than ever, but Dorothy apprehended "the fly in the amber."

CHAPTER XVII

"DO YOU UNDERSTAND TAVIA?"

"You got this old timer running round in circles, Miss Tavia, when you ask about a feller named Garford Knapp anywhere in this latitude, and working for a feller named Bob. There's more 'Bobs' running ranches out here than there is bobwhites down there East where you live. Too bad you can't remember this here Bob's last name, or his brand.

"Now, come to think, there was a feller named 'Dimples' Knapp used to be found in Desert City, but not in Hardin. And you ought to see Hardin —it's growing some!"

This was a part of what was in Lance Petterby's letter. Had Nat White been allowed to read it he would have learned something else—something that not only would have surprised him and his brother and cousin, but would have served to burn away at once the debris of trouble that seemed suddenly heaped between Tavia and himself.

It was true that Tavia had kept up her corre-

spondence with the good-natured and good-looking cowboy in whom, while she was West, she had become interested, and that against the advice of Dorothy Dale. She did this for a reason deeper than mere mischief.

Lance Petterby had confided in her more than in any of the other Easterners of the party that had come to the big Hardin ranch. Lance was in love with a school teacher of the district while the party from the East was at Hardin; and now he had been some months married to the woman of his choice.

When Tavia read bits of his letters, even to Dorothy, she skipped all mention of Lance's romance and his marriage. This she did, it is true, because of a mischievous desire to plague her chum and Ned and Nat. Of late, since affairs had become truly serious between Nat and herself, she would have at any time explained the joke to Nat had she thought of it, or had he asked her about Lance.

The very evening previous to the arrival of this letter from the cowpuncher to which Nat had so unwisely objected, Nat and Tavia had gone for a walk together in the crisp December moonlight and had talked very seriously.

Nat, although as full of fun as Tavia herself, could be grave; and he made his intention and his desires very plain to the girl. Tavia would not

show him all that was in her heart. That was not her way. She was always inclined to hide her deeper feelings beneath a light manner and light words. But she was brave and she was honest. When he pinned her right down to the question, yes or no, Tavia looked courageously into Nat's eyes and said:

"Yes, Nat. *I do.* But somebody besides you must ask me before I will agree to—to 'make you happy' as you call it."

"For the good land's sake!" gasped Nat. "Who's business is it but ours? If you love me as I love you——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Tavia, with laughter breaking forth. " 'No knife can cut our love in two.' But, *dear*——"

"Oh, Tavia!"

"Wait, honey," she whispered, with her face close pressed against his shoulder. "No! don't kiss me now. You've kissed me before—in fun. The next time you kiss me it must be in solemn earnest."

"By heaven, girl!" exclaimed Nat, hoarsely. "Do you think I am fooling now?"

"No, boy," she whispered, looking up at him again suddenly. "But somebody else must ask me before I have a right to promise what you want."

"Who?" demanded Nat, in alarm.

"You know that I am a poor girl. Not only that, but I do not come from the same stock that you do. There is no blue blood in my veins," and she uttered a little laugh that might have sounded bitter had there not been the tremor of tears in it.

"What nonsense, Tavia!" the young man cried, shaking her gently by the shoulders.

"Oh no, Nat! Wait! I am a poor girl and I come of very, very common stock. I don't mean I am ashamed of my poverty, or of the fact that my father and mother both sprang from the laboring class.

"But you might be expected when you marry to take for a wife a girl from a family whose forebears were *something*. Mine were not. Why, one of my grandfathers was an immigrant and dug ditches——"

"Pshaw! I had a relative who dug a ditch, too. In Revolutionary times——"

"That is it exactly," Tavia hastened to say. "I know about him. He helped dig the breastworks on Breeds Hill and was wounded in the Battle of Bunker Hill. I know all about that. Your people were Pilgrim and Dutch stock."

"Immigrants, too," said Nat, muttering. "And maybe some of them left their country across the seas for their country's good."

"It doesn't matter," said the shrewd Tavia.

Being an immigrant in America in sixteen hundred is one thing. Being an immigrant in the latter end of the nineteenth century is an entirely different pair of boots."

"Oh, Tavia!"

"No. Your mother has been as kind to me—and for years and years—as though I were her niece, too, instead of just one of Dorothy's friends. She may have other plans for her sons, Nat."

"Nonsense!"

"I will not answer you," the girl cried, a little wildly now, and began to sob. "Oh, Nat! Nat! I have thought of this so much. Your mother must ask me, or I can never tell you what I want to tell you!"

Nat respected her desire and did not kiss her although she clung, sobbing, to him for some moments. But after she had wiped away her tears and had begun to joke again in her usual way, they went back to the house.

And Nat White knew he was walking on air! He could not feel the path beneath his feet.

He was obliged to go to town early the next morning, and when he returned, as we have seen, just before dinner, he brought the mail bag up from the North Birchland post-office.

He could not understand Tavia's attitude regarding Lance Petterby's letter, and he was both hurt and jealous. Actually he was jealous!

"Do you understand Tavia?" he asked his cousin Dorothy, right after dinner.

"My dear boy," Dorothy Dale said, "I never claimed to be a seer. *Who* understands Tavia—fully?"

"But you know her better than anybody else."

"Better than Tavia knows herself, perhaps," admitted Dorothy.

"Well, see here! I've asked her to marry me——"

"Oh, Nat! my dear boy! I am so glad!" Dorothy cried, and she kissed her cousin warmly.

"Don't be so hasty with your congratulations," growled Nat, still red and fuming. "She didn't tell me 'yes.' I don't know now that I want her to. I want to know what she means, getting letters from that fellow out West."

"Oh, Nat!" sighed Dorothy, looking at him levelly. "Are you *sure* you love her?"

He said nothing more, and Dorothy did not add a word. But Tavia waited in vain that evening for Mrs. White to come to her and ask the question which she had told Nat his mother must ask for him.

CHAPTER XVIII

CROSS PURPOSES

TAVIA was as loyal a girl as ever stepped in shoe-leather. That was an oft-repeated expression of Major Dale's. He loved "the flyaway" for this very attribute.

Tavia was now attempting to bring joy and happiness for Dorothy out of chaos. Therefore, she felt she dared take nobody into her confidence regarding Lance Petterby's letter.

She replied to Lance at once, explaining more fully about Garry Knapp, the land he was about to sell, and the fact that Eastern schemers were trying to obtain possession of Knapp's ranch for wheat land and at a price far below its real worth.

Satisfaction, Tavia might feel in this attempt to help Dorothy; but everything else in the world was colored blue—very blue, indeed!

When one's ear has become used to the clatter of a noisy little windmill, for instance, and the wind suddenly ceases and it remains calm, the cessation of the mill's clatter is almost a shock to the nerves.

This was about the way Tavia's sudden shift of

manner struck all those observant ones at The Cedars. As the season of joy and gladness and good-will approached, Tavia Travers sank lower and lower into a Slough of Despond.

Had it not been for Dorothy Dale, the others must have audibly remarked Tavia's lack of sparkle. Though Dorothy did not imagine that Tavia was engaged in any attempt to help her, and because of that attempt had refused to explain Lance Petterby's letter to Nat White, yet she loyally began to act as a buffer between the others and the contrary Tavia. More than once did Dorothy fly to Tavia's rescue when she seemed to be in difficulties.

Tavia had a streak of secrecy in her character that sometimes placed her in a bad light when judged by unknowing people. Dorothy, however, felt sure that on this present occasion there was no real fault to be found with her dear friend.

Nat refused to speak further about his feeling toward Tavia; Dorothy knew better than to try to tempt Tavia herself to explain. The outstanding difficulty was the letter from the Westerner. Feeling sure, as she did, that Tavia liked Nat immensely and really cared nothing for any other man, Dorothy refrained from hinting at the difficulty to her chum. Let matters take their course. That was the better way, Dorothy believed. She felt that Nat's deeper affections had

been moved and that only the surface of his pride and jealousy were nicked. On the other hand she knew Tavia to be a most loyal soul, and she could not imagine that there was really any cause, other than mischief, for Tavia to allow that letter to stand between Nat and herself.

To smooth over the rough edges and hide any unpleasantness from the observation of the older members of the family, Dorothy became very active in the social life of The Cedars again. No longer did she refuse to attend the cousins and Jennie and Tavia in any venture. It was a quintette of apparently merry young people once more; never a quartette. Nor were Nat and Tavia seen alone together during those few short weeks preceding Christmas.

Secretly, Dorothy was very unhappy over the misunderstanding between her chum and Nat. That it was merely a disagreement and would not cause a permanent break between the two was her dear hope. For she wished to see them both happy. Although at one time she thought the steadier Ned, the older cousin, might be a better mate for her flyaway friend, she had come to see it differently of late. If anybody could understand and properly appreciate Tavia Travers it was Nathaniel White. His mind, too, was quick, his imagination colorful. Dorothy Dale, with growing understanding of character and the men-

tal equipment to judge her associates better than most girls, or young women, of her age, believed in her heart that neither Tavia nor Nat would ever get along with any other companion as well as the two could get along together.

The two "wildfires," as Aunt Winnie sometimes called them, had always had occasional bickerings. But a dispute is like a thunderstorm—it usually clears the air.

Nor did Dorothy doubt for a moment that her cousin and her friend were deeply in love now, the one with the other. That Tavia had turned without explanation about Lance Petterby's letter from Nat and that the latter had told Dorothy he was not sure he wished Tavia to answer the important question he had put to her, sprang only from pique on Nat's side, and, Dorothy was sure, from something much the same in her chum's heart.

Light-minded and frivolous as Tavia had always appeared, Dorothy knew well that the undercurrent of her chum's feelings was both deep and strong. Where she gave affection Tavia herself would have said she "loved hard!"

Dorothy had watched, during these past few weeks especially, the intimacy grow between her chum and Nat White. They were bound to each other, Dorothy believed, by many ties. Disagreements did not count. All that was on the surface. Underneath, the tide of their feelings intermingled

and flowed together. She could not believe that any little misunderstanding could permanently divide Tavia and Nat.

But they were at cross purposes—that was plain. Nat was irritated and Tavia was proud. Dorothy knew that her chum was just the sort of person to be hurt most by being doubted.

Nat should have understood that if Tavia had given him reason to believe she cared for him, her nature was so loyal that in no particular could she be unfaithful to the trust he placed in her. His quick appearance of doubt when he saw the letter from the West had hurt Tavia cruelly.

Yet, Dorothy Dale did not try to make peace between the two by going to Nat and putting these facts before him in the strong light of good sense. She was quite sure that if she did so Nat would come to terms and beg Tavia's pardon. That was Nat's way. He never took a middle course. He must be either at one extreme of the pendulum's swing or the other.

And Dorothy was sure that it would not be well, either for Nat or for Tavia, for the former to give in without question and shoulder the entire responsibility for this lover's quarrel. For to Dorothy Dale's mind there was a greater shade of fault upon her chum's side of the controversy than there was on Nat's. Because of the very fact that all her life Tavia had been flirting or

making believe to flirt, there was some reason for Nat's show of spleen over the Petterby letter.

Dorothy did not know what had passed between Tavia and Nat the evening before the arrival of the letter. She did not know what Tavia had demanded of Nat before she would give him the answer he craved.

Nat kept silence. Mrs. White did not come to Tavia and ask the question which meant so much to the warm-hearted girl. Tavia suffered in every fiber of her being, but would not betray her feelings. And Dorothy waited her chance to say something to her chum that might help to clear up the unfortunate state of affairs.

So all were at cross purposes, and gradually the good times at The Cedars became something of a mockery.

CHAPTER XIX

WEDDING BELLS IN PROSPECT

FOUR days before Christmas Dorothy Dale, her cousins, and Tavia all boarded the train with Jennie Hapgood, bound for the latter's home in Pennsylvania. On Christmas Eve Jennie's brother Jack was to be married, and he had written jointly with the young lady who was to be "Mrs. Jack" after that date, that the ceremony could not possibly take place unless the North Birchland crowd of young folk crossed the better part of two states, to be "in at the finish."

"Goodness me," drawled Tavia, when this letter had come from Sunnyside Farm. "He talks as though wedded bliss were something like a sentence to the penitentiary. How horrid!"

"It is. For a lot of us men," Nat said, grinning. "No more stag parties with the fellows for one thing. Cut out half the time one might spend at the club. And then, there is the pocket peril."

"The—the *what?*" demanded Jennie. "What under the sun is that?"

"A new one on me," said Ned. "Out with it, 'Thaniel. What is the 'pocket peril'?"

"Why, after a fellow is married they tell me that he never knows when he puts his hand in his pocket whether he will find money there or not. Maybe Friend Wife has beaten him to it."

"For shame!" cried Dorothy. "You certainly deserve never to know what Tavia calls 'wedded bliss.' "

"I have my doubts as to my ever doing so," muttered Nat, his face suddenly expressing gloom; and he marched away.

Jennie and Ned did not observe this. Indeed, it was becoming so with them that they saw nobody but each other. Their infatuation was so plain that sometimes it was really funny. Yet even Tavia, with her sharp tongue, spared the happy couple any gibes. Sometimes when she looked at them her eyes were bright with moisture. Dorothy saw this, if nobody else did.

However, the trip to western Pennsylvania was very pleasant, indeed. Dorothy posed as chaperon, and the boys voted that she made an excellent one.

The party got off gaily; but after a while Ned and Jennie slipped away to the observation platform, cold as the weather was, and Nat plainly felt ill at ease with his cousin and Tavia. He grumbled something about Ned having become "an old poke," and sauntered into another car, leaving Tavia alone with Dorothy Dale in their

compartment. Almost at once Dorothy said to her chum:

"Tavia, dear, are you going to let this thing go on, and become worse and worse?"

"What's that?" demanded Tavia, a little tartly.

"This misunderstanding between you and Nat? Aren't you risking your own happiness as well as his?"

"Dorothy——"

"Don't be angry, dear," her chum hastened to say. "Please don't. I hate to see both you and Nat in such a false position."

"How false?" demanded Tavia.

"Because you are neither of you satisfied with yourselves. You are both wrong, perhaps; but I think that under the circumstances you, dear, should put forth the first effort for reconciliation."

"With Nat?" gasped Tavia.

"Yes."

"Not to save my life!" cried her friend. "Never!"

"Oh, Tavia!"

"You take his side because of that letter," Tavia said accusingly. "Well, if *that's* the idea, here's another letter from Lance!" and she opened her bag and produced an envelope on which appeared the cowboy's scrawling handwriting. Dorothy knew it well.

"Oh, Tavia!"

"Don't 'Oh, Tavia' me!" exclaimed the other girl, her eyes bright with anger. "Nobody has a right to choose my correspondents for me."

"You know that all the matter is with Nat, he is jealous," Dorothy said frankly.

"What right has he to be?" demanded Tavia in a hard voice, but looking away quickly.

"Dear," said Dorothy softly, laying her hand on Tavia's arm, "he told me he—he asked you to marry him."

"He never!"

"But you knew that was what he meant," Dorothy said shrewdly.

Tavia was silent, and her friend went on to say:

"You know he thinks the world of you, dear. If he didn't he would not have been angered. And I do think—considering everything—that you ought not to continue to let that fellow out West write to you——"

Tavia turned on her with hard, flashing eyes. She held out the letter, saying in a voice quite different from her usual tone:

"I want you to read this letter—but only on condition that you say nothing to Nat White about it, not a word! Do you understand, Dorothy Dale?"

"No," said Dorothy, wondering. "I do *not* understand."

"You understand that I am binding you to secrecy, at least," Tavia continued in the same tone.

"Why—yes—*that,*" admitted her friend.

"Very well, then, read it," said Tavia and turned to look out of the window while Dorothy withdrew the closely written, penciled pages from the envelope and unfolded them.

In a moment Dorothy cried aloud:

"Oh, Tavia! you wrote him about Mr. Knapp!"

"Yes," said Tavia.

"Oh, my dear! is *that* why he wrote you the other time? Of course! And he says he can't find him. Dimples Knapp he calls him. Oh, my dear!"

"Well," said Tavia, in the same gruff voice. "Read on." She did not turn from the window.

"Oh, Tavia!" Dorothy said in a moment or two. "Those men are out there buying up wheat lands—Stiffbold and Lightly. Lance says he has met them."

"I am afraid your friend, 'Garry Owen,' will be beat," said Tavia, shrugging her shoulders. "Do you see what Lance says next?"

"He thinks he may get word of this Knapp he knows in a few days. Thinks he may be working for a man named Robert Douglas. Oh, Tavia! Of course he is! That is the name of his employer!"

But Tavia displayed very little interest. "I had forgotten," she said.

"Bob Douglas! Of course you remember! And Lance says he'll get word to him and tip him off, as he calls it, about the land-sharks. Oh, Tavia!"

Her friend still looked out of the window. Dorothy shook her by the elbow, staring at the written lines of Lance Petterby's letter.

"What does this mean?" she demanded. "'Sue sends her best, and so does Ma.' Who is Sue?"

"Why, that is Mrs. Petterby, the younger," drawled Tavia, flashing a glance at Dorothy.

"Married?" gasped Dorothy.

"According to law," responded Tavia, solemnly. "And worse. Read on."

Breathlessly, Dorothy Dale consumed the remainder of the letter. Some of it she murmured aloud:

"'The kid is a wonder. You'd ought to see her. Two weeks old to-day and I bet she could sit a bucking pony. You're elected godmother, Miss Tavia, because she is going to be called 'Octavia Susan Petterby,' believe me!"

"Oh, Tavia!" finished Dorothy, crumpling the letter in her hand. "And you never told us a word about it. *That's* why you wanted to buy a silver mug!"

"Yes," Tavia admitted.

"And they have been married how long?"

"Almost a year. Soon after we came away from Hardin."

"And you never said a word," Dorothy said accusingly. "We all supposed——"

"That I was flirting with poor old Lance. Yes," said Tavia, her eyes and voice both hard.

"And why shouldn't we think so?" asked Dorothy, quietly. "You do so many queer things. Or you *used* to."

"I don't now," said her friend, bruskly.

"No. But how were we to know? How was Nat to know?" she added.

Then Tavia turned on her with excitement. "You promised not to tell!" she said. "Don't you *dare* let Nat White know about this letter!"

CHAPTER XX

A GIRL OF TO-DAY

"It was the prettiest wedding I ever saw," Dorothy Dale declared, as the party, bound for North Birchland again, climbed aboard the midnight train at the station nearest Sunnyside Farm.

"And the bride was too sweet for anything," added Jennie Hapgood, who was returning to The Cedars as agreed, to remain until after New Year's.

"Jack looked quite as they always do," said Ned in a hollow voice.

"As who always do?" demanded Tavia.

"The brooms."

" 'Brooms'!" cried Dorothy. "Grooms, Ned?"

"He's a 'new broom' all right," chuckled Edward White. "Poor chap! he doesn't know what it means to love, honor, obey, and buy frocks and hats for a girl of to-day."

"Pah!" retorted his brother, "you'd like to be in his shoes, Nedward."

"Me? I—guess—not!" declared Edward. "I have my own shoes to stand in, thank you,"

and Ned looked at Jennie Hapgood with a meaning air.

So the party came back to The Cedars in much the same state as it had gone to the wedding. Ned and Jennie were so much taken up with each other that they were frankly oblivious to the mutual attitude of Nat and Tavia. Dorothy Dale was kept busy warding off happenings that might attract the particular attention of Major Dale and Aunt Winnie to the real situation between the two.

Besides, Dorothy had "troubles of her own," as the saying goes. She felt that she must decide, and neglect the decision no longer, a very, very important matter that concerned herself more than it did anybody else in the world—a matter that she was selfishly interested in.

Ample time had passed now for Dorothy Dale to consider from all standpoints this really wonderful thing that had come into her life and had so changed her outlook. On the surface she might seem the same Dorothy Dale to her friends and relatives; but secretly the whole world was different to her since that shopping trip she and Tavia had taken to New York wherein she and her chum had met Garry Knapp.

A thousand times Dorothy had called up the details of every incident of the adventure—this greatest of all adventures Dorothy Dale had ever entered upon.

She felt that she should never meet again a man like Garry Knapp. None of the boys she had known before had ever made much of an impression on Dorothy Dale's well-balanced mind. But from the beginning she had looked upon the young Westerner with a new vision. His reflection filled the mirror of her thought as splendidly as at first. The dimple that showed faintly in one bronzed cheek, his rather large but well-formed features, his mop of black hair, his broad shoulders and well-set-up body—all these personal attributes belonging to Garry Knapp were as clearly fixed in Dorothy's mind now as at first.

So, too, her memory of all that had happened was clear. Garry's proffered help in the department store when Tavia was in trouble first aroused Dorothy to an appreciation of his unstudied kindness. It was the most natural thing in the world for him to offer aid when he saw anybody in trouble.

Dorothy blushed now whenever she thought of her doubts of Garry Knapp when she had seen him so easily fall into conversation with the department store salesgirl on the street. Why! that was exactly what he would do—especially if the girl asked him for help. She still blushed at the remembrance of the jealous feeling that had prompted her avoidance of the young man until his action was explained. Her pique had short-

ened her acquaintanceship with Garry Knapp. She might have known him far better had it not been for that incident of the shopgirl.

"And my own suspicion was the cause of it. I refused to meet Garry Knapp as Tavia did. Why! she knows him better than I do," Dorothy Dale told herself.

It was after her discovery of why Tavia had been writing to Lance Petterby and receiving answers from that "happy tho' married cowboy person," to quote Tavia, that Dorothy so searched her own heart regarding Garry Knapp.

"You are a dear, loyal friend, Tavia," she told her chum. "But—but *why* are you trying so to get in touch with Mr. Knapp?"

"Really want me to tell you?" demanded Tavia.

"Yes."

"Truly-rooly—black-and-bluely?"

"Of course, dear."

"Because I have been a regular ivory-kopf!" cried Tavia. "Forgive my hybrid German. Oh, Dorothy! I didn't want to tell you, for I hoped Lance might quickly find your Garry Knapp."

"*My* Garry Knapp," said Dorothy, blushing.

"Yes, my dear. Don't dodge the fact. We all seem to be suddenly grown up. We are shucking our shells of maidenhood like crabs——"

"Tavia! Horrors! Don't!" begged Dorothy.

"Don't like my metaphor, dear?" chuckled

Tavia. But she was grim again in a moment, continuing: "No use dodging the fact, I repeat. You were interested in that man from the beginning. Now, weren't you?"

"Ye—es, Tavia," admitted her friend.

"And I should have seen that you were. I ought to have known, when you were put out with him because of that shopgirl, that for that very reason you were more interested in Garry Knapp than in any other fellow who ever shined up to you——"

"Tavia! How can you?"

"Huh! Just as e-asy," responded her friend, with a wicked twinkle in her eye and mimicking Garry Knapp's manner of speaking. "Now, listen!" she hurried on. "That night I took dinner with him alone—the evening you had the—er—headache and went to bed. 'Member?"

"Oh, yes," sighed Dorothy, nodding.

"He just pumped me about you," said Tavia. "And I was just foolish enough to tell him all about your money—how rich your folks were and all that."

"Oh!" and Dorothy flushed again.

"You don't get it—not yet," said Tavia, wagging her head. "Afterwards I remembered how funny he looked when I had told him that you were a regular 'sure-enough' heiress, and I remembered some things he said, too."

"What do you mean?" asked Dorothy, faintly.

"Why, I scared him away from you," blurted out Tavia, almost in tears when she thought of what she called her "ivory-headedness." "I know that he was just as deeply smitten with you, dear, as—as—well, as ever a man could be! But he's poor—and he's game. I think that is why he went off in such a hurry and without trying *very* hard to see you again."

"Oh, Tavia! Do you believe that is so?" and the joy in Dorothy's voice could not be mistaken.

"Well!" exclaimed Tavia, "isn't that pretty bad? You act as though you were pleased."

Dorothy blushed again, but she was brave. She gazed straight into Tavia's eyes as she said:

"I am pleased, dear. I am pleased to learn that possibly it was not his lack of interest in poor little me that sent him away from New York so hastily—at least, without making a more desperate effort to see me."

"Oh, Doro!" cried Tavia, suddenly putting both arms around her friend. "Do you actually mean it?"

"Mean what?"

"That you l-l-*like* him so much?"

Dorothy laughed aloud, but nodded emphatically. "I l-l-*like* him just as much as that," she mocked. "And if it's only my father's money in the way——"

"And your own. You really will be rich when you are twenty-one," Tavia reminded her. "I tell you, that young man was troubled a heap when he learned from me that you were so well off. If you had been a poor girl—if you had been *me*, for instance—he would never have left New York City without knowing his fate. I could see it in his eyes."

"Oh, Tavia!" gasped Dorothy, with clasped hands and shining eyes.

"My dear," said her friend, with serious mouth but dancing orbs. "I never would have thought it possible—of *you*. 'Love like a lightning bolt'—just like that. And the cautious Dorothy!" Then she went on: "But, Dorothy, how will you ever find him?"

"You have done your best, Tavia," her friend said, nodding. "I suppose I might have tried Lance Petterby, too. But now I shall put Aunt Winnie's lawyers to work out there. If possible, Mr. Knapp must be found before those real estate sharks buy his land. But if the transaction is completed, we shall have to reach him in some other way."

"Dorothy! You sound woefully strong-minded. Do you mean to go right after the young man—just as though it were leap year?" and Tavia giggled.

"I hope," said Dorothy Dale, girl of to-day that

she was, "I have too much good sense to lose the chance of showing the man I love that he can win me, because of any foolish or old-fashioned ideas of conventionalities. If Garry Knapp thinks as much of me as I do of him, his lack of an equal fortune sha'n't stand in the way, either."

"Oh, Doro! it sounds awful—but bully!" Tavia declared, her eyes round. "Do you mean it?"

"Yes," said Dorothy, courageously.

"But suppose he is one of those stubborn beings you read about—one of the men who will not marry a girl with money unless he has a 'working capital' himself?"

"That shall not stand in our way."

"What do you mean?" gasped Tavia. "Not that you would give up your money for him?"

"If I find I love him enough—yes," said Dorothy, softly.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BUD UNFOLDS

In a certain way it ages a girl to be left motherless as Dorothy Dale had been. She had been obliged to "play mother" herself so early that her maternal instincts were strongly and early developed.

Until the Dale family had come away from Dalton to live with Aunt Winnie at The Cedars, Dorothy had exercised her motherly oversight in the little family. Indeed, Roger scarcely knew any other mother than Dorothy, and Joe had almost forgotten her who had passed away soon after Roger was born.

As for the major, he had soon given all domestic matters over into the small but capable hands of "the little captain" while they were still struggling in poverty. After coming to The Cedars, Dorothy, of course, had been relieved of the close oversight of domestic and family matters that had previously been her portion. But its effect upon her character was plain to all observing eyes. Nor had her so early developed maternal characteristics failed to affect the other members of the family.

Now that she was really grown up past the schoolgirl age and of a serious and thoughtful demeanor, even Aunt Winnie looked upon her as being much older than Tavia—and years older than the boys. That Ned and Nat were both several years Dorothy's senior made no difference.

"Boys are to a degree irresponsible—and always are, no matter how old they become," said Aunt Winnie. "But *Dorothy*——"

Her emphasis was approved by the major. "The little captain is some girl," he said, chuckling. "Beg pardon! woman grown, eh, Sister?"

Nor was his approval merely of Dorothy's surface qualities. He knew that his pretty daughter was a much deeper thinker than most girls of her age, and he had seldom interfered in any way with Dorothy's personal decisions on any subject.

"Let her find out for herself. She won't go far wrong," had often been his remark at first when his sister had worried over Dorothy in her school days. And so the girl developed into something that not all girls are—an original thinker.

Knowing her as the major did and trusting in her good sense so fully, he was less startled, perhaps, than he would otherwise have been when Dorothy took him into her confidence regarding Garry Knapp. Tavia had refrained from joking about the Westerner from the first. Little

had been said before the family about their adventures in New York. Therefore, the major was not prepared in the least for the introduction of the subject.

Perhaps it would not have been introduced in quite the way it was had it not grown out of another matter. It came the day after Christmas—that day in which everybody is tired and rather depressed because of the over-exertion of celebrating the feast of good Kris Kringle. Dorothy was busy at the sewing basket beside her father's comfortable chair. She knew that Tavia was writing letters and just at this moment Major Dale dropped his paper to peer out of the window.

"There goes Nat—off for a tramp, I'll be bound. And he's alone," the major said.

"Yes," agreed Dorothy without looking up.

"And Ned and that Jennie girl are in the library, and you're here," pursued the major, with raised eyebrows. "Where is Tavia?"

She told him; but she refrained again from looking up, and he finally bent forward in his chair and thrust a forefinger under her chin, raising it and making her look at him.

"Say! what is the matter with Tavia and Nat?" he asked.

"Are you sure there is anything the matter, Major?" Dorothy responded.

"Can't fool me. They're at outs. And you,

Captain? Is that what makes you so grave, my dear?"

"No, Daddy," she said, putting down her work and looking into his rugged face this time of her own volition.

"Something personal, my dear?"

"Very personal, Daddy," calling him by the intimate name the children used. "I—I think I—I am in love."

He neither made a joke of it nor appeared astonished. He just eyed her quietly and nodded. The flush mounted into her face and she glowed like a red rose. After all, it is not the easiest thing in the world to turn the heart out for others to look at, even the dearest of others.

"I think I am in love. And the young man is poor—and—and I am afraid our money is going to stand between him and me."

"My dear Dorothy," said the major, "are you really in love with somebody, or in love with love?"

"I know what you mean," his daughter said, with a tremulous little laugh and shaking her head. "Seeing so many about us falling into the toils of Dan Cupid, you think I perhaps imagine I have fixed my affections upon some particular object. Is that it, Major?"

He nodded, a quizzical little smile on his lips.

"No," she said. "It isn't anywhere as near as

simple as that. I—I do love him I believe. He is the only man I have ever really thought twice about. He is the center of all my thoughts now, and has been for a long time."

"But—but who is he?" the major gasped.

"Garry Knapp."

Her father repeated the name slowly and his expression of countenance certainly displayed amazement. "Did I ever see the young man?"

"No."

"Your aunt—one of your cousins' friends?"

"Dear Daddy," said Dorothy, frankly and smiling a little. "I have done something not at all as you would expect cautious little me to do. I have picked a man—and, oh, he *is* a man, Daddy! —right out of the great mob of folks. Nobody introduced us. We just—well, *met*."

"The young man has been spoken of by Tavia, I believe," said Major Dale, quite cheerfully. "I remember now. Mr. Knapp. You met him at the hotel in New York?"

"Before we got to the hotel. In the train I noticed him—vaguely. On the platform where we changed cars at that Manhattan Transfer place, I saw him better. I—I never was so much interested in a man before."

Major Dale looked at her rather solemnly for a moment. "Are you sure, my dear, it is anything more than fancy?"

"Quite sure."

"And—and—*he*——"

The man's voice actually trembled. Dorothy looked at him again, dropped the sewing from her lap and suddenly flung her arms about his neck.

"Oh, my dear!" she murmured, her face hidden. "I know he loves me, too. I am sure of it! Let me tell you."

Breathlessly, her voice quavering a little but full of an element of happiness that fairly thrilled her listener, she related all the incidents—even the petty details—of her acquaintance with Garford Knapp, of Desert City. So clear was her picture of the young man that the major saw him in his mind's eye just as Garry appeared to Dorothy Dale.

She went over every little thing that had happened in New York in connection with the young Westerner. She told of her own mean suspicions and how they had risen from a feeling of pique and jealousy that never in her life had she experienced before.

"That was a rather small way for me to show real feeling for a person. But it caught me unprepared," said Dorothy, with a full-throated laugh although her eyes were full of tears. "I do not believe I am naturally of a jealous disposition; and I should never let such a feeling get the better of me again. It has cost me too much."

She went on and told the major of the incidents that followed and how Garry Knapp had gone away so hastily without her speaking to him again.

But the major rather lost the thread of her story for a moment. He was staring closely at her, shaking his shaggy head slowly.

"My dear! my dear!" he murmured, "you have grown up. The bud has unfolded. Our demure little Dorothy is—and with shocking abruptness—blown into full womanhood. My dear!" and he put his arms about her again more tightly.

CHAPTER XXII

DOROTHY DECIDES

Joe and Roger Dale did not feel that they were exactly neglected during these winter holidays. It is true they found their cousins, the "big fellows," not so much fun as they were wont to be, and even Dorothy failed them at times.

But because of these very facts the lads had more freedom of action than ever before. They were learning to think for themselves, especially Joe. Nor was it always mischief they thought of, though frequently managing to get into trouble—for what live and healthy boys of their age do not?

Many of their narrow escapes even Dorothy knew nothing about. None of the family, for instance, knew about Joe and the lame pigeon until the North Birchland Fire Department was on the grounds with all their apparatus.

This moving incident (Tavia declared it should have been a movie incident) happened between Christmas and the new year. Although there had been a good fall of snow before Kris Kringle's day, it had all gone now and the roads were firmly

frozen again, so the Fire Department got to The Cedars in record time.

To begin with Joe and Roger were breeders of pigeons, as Ned and Nat had been several years before. On pleasant days in the winter they let their flock into the big flying cage, and occasionally allowed the carriers to take a flight in the open.

On one of these occasions when the flock returned there was a stray with them. Roger's sharp eyes spied this bird which alighted on the ridgepole of the stable.

"Oh, lookut! lookut!" exclaimed the youngest Dale. "What a pretty one, Joe!"

"We'll coax it down. It's a stray," his brother said eagerly, "and all strays are fair game."

"But it's lame, Joe," Roger declared. "See! it can scarcely hop. And it acts as if all tired out."

"It's a carrier, all right," Joe said. "I bet it's come a long way."

The bird, however, would not be coaxed to the ground or into the big cage. It really did appear exhausted.

"I bet if I could get up there on the stable roof, I could pick it right up in my hand," cried Joe. "I'm—I'm a-going—to try it!"

"Oh!" murmured Roger, both his eyes and mouth very round.

Joe was no "blowhard," as the boys say. When he said he'd do a thing he did his best to accomplish it. He threw off his thick jacket that would have hampered him, and kicked aside his overshoes that made his feet clumsy, and started to go aloft in the stable.

"You go outside and watch, Roger," he commanded. "There's no skylight in this old barn roof—only the cupola, and I can't get out through that."

"How are you going to do it then?" gasped Roger.

"You'll see," his brother said with assurance, and began to climb the hay ladder into the top loft of the building.

Roger ran out just in time to see Joe open the small door up in the peak of the stable roof. There were water-troughs all around the roof, for the cattle were supplied with drinking water from cisterns built under the ground.

A leader ran down each corner of the stable, and one of these was within reach of Joe Dale's hands when he swung himself out upon the door he had opened.

Nobody, except the boys, were about the stable, and this end of the building could not be seen from the house. Joe had once before performed a similar trick. He had swung from the door to the leader-pipe and swarmed down to the ground.

"Look out you don't tumble, Joe," advised the eager Roger. But he had no idea that Joe would do so. The elder brother was a hero in the sight of the younger lad.

Joe's skill and strength did not fail him now. He caught the leader, then the water-trough itself, and so scrambled upon the roof. But at his last kick some fastening holding the leader-pipe gave way and the top of it swung out from the corner of the stable.

"Oh, cricky!" yelled Roger. "Lucky you got up there, Joe. That pipe's busted. How'll you get down?"

"Never mind that," grunted Joe, somewhat breathless, scrambling up the roof to the ridge-pole. "We'll see about that later."

The boy reached the ridge and straddled it. There he got his breath and then hitched along toward the cooing pigeon. It was not frightened by him, but it certainly was lame and exhausted. Joe picked it up in his hand and snuggled it into the breast of his sweater.

"But how are you ever going to get down, Joe Dale?" shrilled Roger, from the ground.

The question was a poser, as Joe very soon found out. That particular leader had been the only one on the stable that he could reach with any measure of safety; and now it hung out a couple of feet from the side of the building and

Joe would not have dared trust his weight upon it, even could he have reached it.

"What are you going to do?" again wailed the smaller lad.

"Aw, cheese it, Roger! don't be bawling," advised Joe from the roof. "Go and get a ladder."

"There isn't any long enough to reach up there —you know that," said Roger.

Neither he nor Joe observed the fact that, even had there been a ladder, the smaller boy could not have raised it into place so that Joe could have descended upon it.

None of the men working on the place was at hand. Ned and Nat were off on some errand in their car. Secretly, Roger was panic stricken and might have run for Dorothy, for she was still his refuge in all troubles.

But Joe was older—and thought himself wiser. "We've just got to find a ladder—*you've* got to find it, Roger. I can't sit up here a-straddle of this old roof all day. It's co-o-old!"

Roger started off blindly. He could not remember whether any of the neighbors possessed long ladders or not. But as he came down to the street corner of the White property he saw a red box affixed to a telegraph pole on the edge of the sidewalk.

"Oh, bully!" gasped Roger, and immediately scrambled over the fence.

He knew what that red box was for. It had been explained to him, and he had longed for a good reason for experimenting with it. You broke the little square of glass and pulled down the hook inside——

That is how Ned and Nat, whizzing homeward in their car, came to join the procession of the Fire Department racing out of town toward The Cedars.

"Where's the fire, Cal?" yelled Nat, seeing a man he knew riding on the ladder truck.

"Right near your house, Mr. White. At any rate, that was the number pulled—that box by the corner of your mother's place."

"Did you hear that, Ned?" shouted his brother, and Ned, who was at the wheel, "let her out," breaking every speed law of the country to flinders.

The Fire Chief in his red racing car was only a few rods ahead of the Whites, therefore, when Ned whirled the automobile into the driveway. They saw a small boy, greatly excited, dancing up and down on the gravel beside the chief's car.

"Yep—he's up on the stable roof, I tell you. We've got to use your extension ladders to get him down," Roger was saying eagerly. "I didn't mean for all of the things to come—the engine, and hose cart, and all. Just the ladders we wanted," and Roger seemed amazed that his pulling the

hook of the fire-alarm box had not explained all this at fire headquarters down town.

There was some excitement, as may well be believed in and about The Cedars. The Fire Chief was at first enraged; then he, as well as his men, laughed. They got Joe, still clinging to the stray pigeon, down from the roof, and then the firemen drilled back to town, reporting a "false alarm."

Major Dale, however, sent in a check to the Firemen's Benefit Fund, and Joe and Roger were sent to bed at noon and were obliged to remain there until the next morning—a punishment that was likely long to be engraved upon their minds.

The incident, however, had broken in upon a very serious conference between Dorothy Dale and her father. And nowadays their conferences were very likely to be for the discussion of but one subject:

Garry Knapp and his affairs.

Aunt Winnie, too, had been taken into Dorothy Dale's confidence. "I want you both," the girl said, bravely, "to meet Garry Knapp and decide for yourselves if he is not all I say he is. And to do that we must get him to come here."

"How will you accomplish it, Dorothy?" asked her aunt, still more than a little confused because of this entirely new departure upon the part of her heretofore demure niece.

Dorothy explained. Another—a third—letter had come from Lance Petterby. He had identified Garry Knapp as the Dimples Knapp he had previously known upon the range. Knapp was about to sell a run-down ranch north of Desert City and adjoining the rough end of the great Hardin Estate, that now belonged to Major Dale, to some speculators in wheat lands. The speculators, Lance said, were "sure enough sharks."

"First of all have our lawyers out there make Mr. Knapp a much better offer for his land—quick, before Stiffbold and Lightly close with him," Dorothy suggested. "Oh! I've thought it all out. Those land speculators will allow that option they took on Garry's ranch to lapse. What is a hundred dollars to them? Then they will play a waiting game until they make him come to new terms—a much lower price even than they offered him in New York. He must not sell his land to them, and for a song."

"And then?" asked the major, his eyes bright with pride in his daughter's forcefulness of character, as well as with amusement.

"Have our lawyers bind the bargain with Mr. Knapp and ask him to come East to close the transaction with their principal. That's *you,* Major. Meanwhile, have the lawyers send an expert to Mr. Knapp's ranch to see if it is really promising wheat land if properly developed."

"And then?" repeated her father.

"If it *is*," said Dorothy, laughing blithely, "when Garry shows up and you and Aunt Winnie approve of him, as I know you both will, offer to advance the money necessary to develop the wheat ranch instead of buying the land.

"That," Dorothy Dale said earnestly, "will give him the start in business life he needs. I know he has it in him to make good. He can expect no fortune from his uncle in Alaska, who is angry with him; he will *never* hear to using any of my money to help bring success; but in this way he will have his chance. I believe he will be independent in a few years."

"And, meanwhile, what of you?" cried her aunt.

"I shall be waiting for him," replied Dorothy with a smile that Tavia, had she seen it, would have pronounced "seraphic."

"Major! did you ever hear of such talk from a girl?" gasped Aunt Winnie.

"No," said her brother, with immense satisfaction, and thumping approval on the floor with his cane. "Because there never was just such a girl since the world began as my little captain.

"I want to see this wonderful Garry Knapp—don't you, Sister? I'm sure he must be a perfectly wonderful young man to so stir our Dorothy."

"No," Dorothy said slowly shaking her head. "I know he is only wonderful in my eyes. But I am quite sure you and Aunt Winnie will commend my choice when you have met him—if we can only get him here!"

CHAPTER XXIII

NAT JUMPS AT A CONCLUSION

ALL this time Tavia and Nat were having anything but a happy life. Nat would not have admitted it for the world, but he wished he could leave home and never appear at The Cedars again until Tavia had gone.

On her part, Tavia would have returned to Dalton before the new year had Dorothy allowed her to have her own way. Dorothy would not hear of such a thing.

To make the situation worse for the pair of young people so tragically enduring their first vital misunderstanding, Ned and Jennie Hapgood were sailing upon a sea of blissful and unruffled happiness. Nat and Tavia could not help noting this fact. The feeling of the exalted couple for each other was so evident that even the Dale boys discussed it—and naturally with deep disgust.

"Gee!" breathed Joe, scandalized. "Old Ned is so mushy over Jennie Hapgood that he goes around in a trance. He could tread on his own corns and not know it, his head is so far up in the clouds. Gee!"

"*I* wouldn't ever get so silly over a girl—not even our Dorothy," Roger declared. "Would you, Joe?"

"Not in a hundred years," was his brother's earnest response.

The major admitted with a chuckle that Ned certainly was hard hit. The time set for Jennie Hapgood to return to Sunnyside Farm came and passed, and still many reasons were found for the prolongation of her visit. Ned went off to New York one day by himself and brought home at night something that made a prominent bulge in his lower right-hand vest pocket.

"Oh, *oh,* OH! Dorothy!" ejaculated Tavia, for the moment coming out of her own doldrums. "Do you know what it is? A Tiffany box! Nothing less!"

"Dear old Ned," said her chum, with a smile.

Ned and Jennie disappeared together right after dinner. Then, an hour later, they appeared in the drawing-room where the family was assembled and Ned led Jennie forward by her left hand—the fingers prominently extended.

"White gold—platinum!" murmured Tavia, standing enthralled as she beheld the beautifully set stone.

"Set old Ned back five hundred bucks if it did a cent," growled Nat, under his breath and keeping in the background.

"Oh, Jennie!" cried Dorothy, jumping up.

But Aunt Winnie seemed to be nearest. She reached the happy couple before anybody else.

"Ned needn't tell me," she said, with a little laugh and a little sob and putting both arms about Jennie. "Welcome, my daughter! Very welcome to the White family. I have for years tried to divide Dorothy with the major; now I am to have at least *one* daughter of my very own."

Did she flash a glance at Tavia standing in the background? Tavia thought so. The proud and headstrong girl was shot to the quick with the arrow of the thought that Mrs. White had been told by Nat of the difference between himself and Tavia and that the lady would never come to Tavia and ask that question on behalf of her younger son that the girl so desired her to ask.

Never before had Tavia realized so keenly the great chasm between herself and Jennie Hapgood. Mrs. White welcomed Jennie so warmly, and was so glad, because Jennie was of the same level in society as the Whites. Both in blood and wealth Jennie was Ned's equal.

Tavia knew very well that by explaining to Nat about Lance Petterby's letters she could easily bring that young man to his knees. In her heart, in the very fiber of the girl's being, indeed, had grown the desire to have Dorothy Dale's Aunt Winnie tell her that she, too, would be welcome in

the White family. Now Tavia doubted if Aunt Winnie would ever do that.

Jennie was to go home to Sunnyside Farm the next day. This final decision had probably spurred Ned to action. Because of certain business matters in town which occupied both Ned and Nat at train time and the fact that Dorothy was busy with some domestic duty, it was Tavia who drove the *Fire Bird,* the Whites' old car, to the station with Jennie Hapgood.

A train from the West had come in a few minutes before the westbound one which Jennie was to take was due. Tavia, sitting in the car while Jennie ran to get her checks, saw a tall man carrying two heavy suitcases and wearing a broad-brimmed hat walking down the platform.

"Why! if that doesn't look—— Surely it can't be—I—I believe I've got 'em again!" murmured Tavia Travers.

Then suddenly she shot out from behind the wheel, leaped to the platform, and ran straight for the tall figure.

"Garry Knapp!" she exploded.

"Why—why—Miss Travers!" responded the big young man, smiling suddenly and that "cute" little dimple just showing in his bronzed cheek. "You don't mean to say you live in this man's town?"

He looked about the station in a puzzled way,

and, having dropped his bags to shake hands with her, rubbed the side of his head as though to awaken his understanding.

"I don't understand your being here, Miss Travers," he murmured.

"Why, *I'm* visiting here," she said, blithely. "But *you*——?"

"I—I'm here on business. Or I think I am," he said soberly. "How's your—Miss Dale! *She* doesn't live here, does she?"

"Of course. Didn't you know?" demanded Tavia, eyeing him curiously.

"No. Who—what's this Major Dale to her, Miss Travers?" asked the young man and his heavy brows met for an instant over his nose.

"Her father, of course, Mr. Knapp. Didn't you know Dorothy's father was the only Major Dale there *is*, and the nicest man there ever *was?*"

"How should I know?" demanded Garry Knapp, contemplating Tavia with continued seriousness. "What is he—a real estate man?"

"Why! didn't you know?" Tavia asked, thinking quickly. "Didn't I tell you that time that he was a close friend of Colonel Hardin, who owned that estate you told me joined your ranch there by Desert City?"

"Uh-huh," grunted the young man. "Seems to me you *did* tell me something about that. But I—I must have had my mind on something else."

"On *somebody* else, you mean," said Tavia, dimpling suddenly. "Well! Colonel Hardin left his place to Major Dale."

"Oh! that's why, then. He wants to buy my holdings because his land joins mine," said Garry Knapp, reflectively.

Tavia had her suspicions of the truth well aroused; but all she replied was:

"I shouldn't wonder, Mr. Knapp."

"I got a good offer—leastways, better than those sharks, Stiffbold and Lightly, would make me after they'd seen the ranch—from some lawyers out there. They planked down a thousand for an option, and told me to come East and close the deal with this Major Dale. And it never entered into this stupid head of mine that he was related to—to Miss Dale."

"Isn't that funny?" giggled Tavia. Then, as Jennie appeared from the baggage room and the westbound train whistled for the station, she added: "Just wait for me until I see a friend off on this train, Mr. Knapp, and I'll drive you out."

"Drive me out where?" asked Garry Knapp.

"To see—er—*Major* Dale," she returned, and ran away.

When the train had gone she found the Westerner standing between his two heavy bags about where she had left him.

"Those old suitcases look so natural," she said,

laughing at his serious face. "Throw them into the tonneau and sit beside me in front. I'll show you some driving."

"But look here! I can't do this," he objected.

"You cannot do what?" demanded Tavia.

"Are *you* staying with Miss Dale?"

"Of course I am staying with Doro. I don't know but I am more at home at The Cedars than I am at the Travers domicile in Dalton."

"But wait!" he begged. "There must be a hotel here?"

"In North Birchland? Of course."

"You'd better take me there, Miss Travers, if you'll be so kind. I want to secure a room."

"Nothing doing! You've got to come out to The Cedars with me," Tavia declared. "Why, Do—I mean, of course, Major Dale would never forgive me if I failed to bring you, baggage and all. His friends do not stop at the North Birchland House I'd have you know."

"But, honestly, Miss Travers, I don't like it. I don't understand it. And Major Dale isn't my friend."

"Oh, *isn't* he? You just wait and see!" cried Tavia. "I didn't know about your coming East. Of course, if it is business——"

"That is it, exactly," the young man said, nervously. "I—I couldn't impose upon these people, you know."

"Say! you want to sell your land, don't you?" demanded Tavia.

"Ye—es," admitted Garry Knapp, slowly.

"Well, if a man came out your way to settle a business matter, you wouldn't let him go to a hotel, would you? You'd be angry," said Tavia, sensibly, "if he insisted upon doing such a thing. Major Dale could not have been informed when you would arrive, or he would have had somebody here at the station to meet you."

"No. I didn't tell the lawyers when I'd start," said Garry.

"Don't make a bad matter worse then," laughed Tavia, her eyes twinkling as she climbed in and sat back of the wheel. "Hurry up. If you want to sell your land you'd better waste no more time getting out to The Cedars."

The Westerner got into the car in evident doubt. He suspected that he had been called East for something besides closing a real estate transaction. Tavia suspected so, too; and she was vastly amused.

She drove slowly, for Garry began asking her for full particulars about Dorothy and the family. Tavia actually did not know anything about the proposed purchase of the Knapp ranch by her chum's father. Dorothy had said not a word to her about Garry since their final talk some weeks before.

At a place in the woods where there was not a house in sight, Tavia even stopped the car the better to give her full attention to Mr. Garry Knapp, and to talk him out of certain objections that seemed to trouble his mind.

It was just here that Nat White, on a sputtering motorcycle he sometimes rode, passed the couple in the automobile. He saw Tavia talking earnestly to a fine-looking, broad-shouldered young man wearing a hat of Western style. She had an eager hand upon his shoulder and the stranger was evidently much interested in what the girl said.

Nat did not even slow down. It is doubtful if Tavia noticed him at all. Nat went straight home, changed his clothes, flung a few things into a traveling bag, and announced to his mother that he was off for Boston to pay some long-promised visits to friends there and in Cambridge.

Nat, with his usual impulsiveness, had jumped at a conclusion which, like most snap judgments, was quite incorrect. He rode to the railroad station by another way and so did not meet Tavia and Garry Knapp as they approached The Cedars.

CHAPTER XXIV

THIN ICE

DOROTHY spied the Fire Bird just as it turned in at the entrance gate. And she identified the person sitting beside her chum, too. Therefore, she had a few minutes in which to prepare for her meeting with Garry Knapp.

She was on the porch when the car stopped, and her welcome to the young Westerner possessed just the degree of cordiality that it should. Neither by word nor look did she betray the fact that her heart's action was accelerated, or that she felt a thrill of joy to think that the first of her moves in this intricate game had been successful.

"Of course, it would be Tavia's good fortune to pick you up at the station," she said, while Garry held her hand just a moment longer than was really necessary for politeness' sake. "Had you telegraphed us——"

"I hadn't a thought that I was going to run up against Miss Travers or you, Miss Dale," he said.

"Oh, then, this is a business visit?" and she laughed. "Entirely? You only wish to see Major Dale?"

"Well—now—that's unfair," he said, his eyes twinkling. "But I told Miss Travers she might drive me to the hotel."

"Oh, this will be your hotel while you remain, of course. Father would not hear of anything else I am sure."

"I can thank you, then, Miss Dale," he said quietly and with a sudden serious mien, "for the chance to sell my ranch at a better price than those sharks were ready to give?"

"No. You may thank Major Dale's bump of acquisitiveness," she said, laughing at him over her shoulder as she led the way into the house. "Having so much land already out there, like other great property owners, he is always looking for more."

If Garry Knapp was not assured that she was entirely frank upon this matter, he knew that his welcome was as warm as though he were really an old friend. He met Mrs. White almost at once, and Dorothy was delighted by her marked approval of him.

Garry Knapp got to the major by slow degrees. Tavia marveled as she watched Dorothy Dale's calm and assured methods. This was the demure, cautious girl whom she had always looked upon as being quite helpless when it came to managing "affairs" with members of the opposite sex. Tavia imagined she was quite able to manage any man—

"put him in his place," she termed it—much better than Dorothy Dale. But now!

Dorothy quietly sent Joe and Roger out for Mr. Knapp's bags and told them to take the bags up to an indicated room. She made no fuss about it, but took it for granted that Garry Knapp had come for a visit, not for a call.

The young man from the West had to sit down and talk with Aunt Winnie. That lady proceeded in her good-humored and tactful way to draw him out. Aunt Winnie learned more about Garry Knapp in those few minutes than even Tavia had learned when she took dinner with the young man. And all the time the watchful Dorothy saw Garry Knapp growing in her aunt's estimation.

Ned came in. He had been fussing and fuming because business had kept him from personally seeing Jennie Hapgood aboard her train. He welcomed this big fellow from the West, perhaps, because he helped take Ned's mind off his own affairs.

"Come on up and dress for dinner," Ned suggested, having gained Garry Knapp's sole attention. "It's pretty near time for the big eats, and mother is a stickler for the best bib and tucker at the evening meal."

"Great Scott!" gasped Garry Knapp in a panic. "You don't mean dinner dress? I haven't had on a swallowtail since I was in college."

"Tuxedo will do," Ned said lightly. "If you didn't bring 'em I'll lend you. I'm about as broad as you, my boy."

Garry Knapp was three or four years older than Ned, and that "my boy" sounded rather funny. However, the Westerner did not smile. He accepted the loan of the dinner coat and the vest without comment, but he looked very serious while he was dressing.

They went down together to meet the girls in the drawing-room. Dorothy Dale and Tavia had dressed especially for the occasion. Tavia flaunted her fine feathers frankly; but demure Dorothy's eyes shone more gloriously than her frock. Ned said:

"You look scrumptious, Coz. And, of course, Tavia, you are a vision of delight. Where's Nat?"

"Nat?" questioned Tavia, her countenance falling. "Is—isn't he upstairs?"

"Why, don't you know?" Dorothy cried. "He's gone to Boston. Left just before you came back from the station, Tavia."

"Well, of all things!" Ned said. "I'd have gone with him if I'd really believed he meant it. Old grouch! He's been talking of lighting out for a week. But I am glad," he added cordially, looking at Garry Knapp, "that I did not go. Then I, too, might have missed meeting Mr. Knapp."

Now, what was it kept Major Dale away from the dinner table that evening? His excuse was that a twinge or two of rheumatism kept him from appearing with the family when dinner was called. And yet Dorothy did not appear worried by her father's absence as she ordinarily would have been. Tavia was secretly delighted by this added manifestation of Dorothy's finesse. Garry Knapp could not find any excuse for withdrawing from the house until he had interviewed the major.

As was usual at The Cedars, the evening meal was a lively and enjoyable occasion. Tavia successfully hid her chagrin at Nat's absence; but Joe and Roger were this evening the life of the company.

"The river's frozen," sang Roger, "and we're going skating on it, Joe and I. Did you ever go skating, Mr. Knapp?" for Roger believed it only common politeness to bring the visitor into the conversation.

"Sure enough," laughed Garry Knapp. "I used to be some skater, too."

"You'd better come," said Roger. "It's going to be moonlight—Popeye Jordan says so, and he knows, for his father lights the street lamps and this is one of the nights he doesn't have to work."

"I hope Popeye hasn't made a mistake—or Mr. Jordan, either—in reading the almanac," Dorothy said, when the laugh had subsided.

"You'd better come, too, Dorothy," said Joe. "The river's as smooth as glass."

"Let's all go," proposed Tavia, glad to be in anything active that would occupy her mind and perhaps would push out certain unpleasant thoughts that lodged there.

"Mr. Knapp has no skates," said Dorothy, softly.

"Don't let that stop you," the Westerner put in, smiling. "I can go and look on."

"Oh, I guess we can give you a look *in*," said Ned. "There's Nat's skates. I think he didn't take 'em with him."

"Will they fit Mr. Knapp?" asked Tavia.

"Dead sure that nobody's got a bigger foot than old Nat," said his brother wickedly. "If Mr. Knapp can get into my coat, he'll find no trouble in getting into Nat's shoes."

Ned rather prided himself on his own small and slim foot and often took a fling at the size of his brother's shoes. But now, Nat not being present, he hoped to "get a rise" out of Tavia. The girl, however, bit her lip and said nothing. She was not even defending Nat these days.

It was concluded that all should go—that is, all the young people then present. Nat and Jennie's absence made what Ned called "a big hole" in the company.

"You be good to me, Dot," he said to his cousin,

as they waited in the side hall for Tavia to come down. "I'm going to miss Jennie awfully. I want to skate with you and tell you all about it."

"All about what?" demanded his cousin, laughing.

"Why, all about how we came to—to—to find out we cared for each other," Ned whispered, blunderingly enough but very earnest. "You know, Dot, it's just wonderful——"

"You go on, dear," said Dorothy, poking a gloved forefinger at him. "If you two sillies didn't know you were in love with each other till you brought home the ring the other night, why everybody else in the neighborhood was aware of the fact æons and æons ago!"

"Huh?" grunted Ned, his eyes blinking in surprise.

"It was the most transparent thing in the world. Everybody around here saw how the wind blew."

"You don't mean it!" said the really astonished Ned. "Well! and I didn't know it myself till I began to think how bad a time I was going to have without Jennie. I wish old Nat would play up to Tavia."

Dorothy looked at him scornfully. "Well! of all the stupid people who ever lived, most men are *it*," she thought. But what she said aloud was:

"I want to skate with Mr. Knapp, Nedward. You know he is our guest. You take Tavia."

"Pshaw!" muttered her cousin as the girl in question appeared and Garry Knapp and the boys came in from the porch where the Westerner had been trying on Nat's skating boots. "I can't talk to the flyaway as I can to you. But I don't blame you for wanting to skate with Knapp. He seems like a mighty fine fellow."

Dorothy was getting the family's opinion, one by one, of the man Tavia wickedly whispered Dorothy had "set her cap" for. The younger boys were plainly delighted with Garry Knapp. When the party got to the river Joe and Roger would scarcely let the guest and Dorothy get away by themselves.

Garry Knapp skated somewhat awkwardly at first, for he had not been on the ice for several years. But he was very sure footed and it was evident utterly unafraid.

He soon "got the hang of it," as he said, and was then ready to skate away with Dorothy. The Dale boys tried to keep up; but with one of his smiles into the girl's face, Knapp suddenly all but picked her up and carried her off at a great pace over the shining, black ice.

"Oh! you take my breath!" she cried half aloud, yet clinging with delight to his arm.

"We'll dodge the little scamps and then get down to *talk*," he said. "I want to know all about it."

"All about what?" she returned, looking at him with shy eyes and a fluttering at her heart that she was glad he could not know about.

"About this game of getting me East again. I can see your fine Italian hand in this, Miss Dale. Does your father really need my land?"

He said it bluntly, and although he smiled, Dorothy realized there was something quite serious behind his questioning.

"Well, you see, after you had left the hotel in New York, Tavia and I overheard those two awful men you agreed to sell to talking about the bargain," she said rather stumblingly, but with earnestness.

"You did!" he exclaimed. "The sharks!"

"That is exactly what they were. They said after Stiffbold got out West he would try to beat you down in your price, although at the terms agreed upon he knew he was getting a bargain."

"Oh-ho!" murmured Garry Knapp. "That's the way of it, eh? They had me scared all right. I gave them an option for thirty days for a hundred dollars and they let the option run out. I was about to accept a lower price when your father's lawyers came around."

"You see, Tavia and I were both interested," Dorothy explained. "And Tavia wrote to a friend of ours, Lance Petterby——"

"Ah! that's why old Lance came riding over

IT SEEMED TO DOROTHY THAT THEY FAIRLY FLEW OVER THE OPEN WATER.

to Bob Douglass' place, was it?" murmured Garry.

"Then," said Dorothy, bravely, "I mentioned the matter to father, and he is always willing to buy property adjoining the Hardin place. Thinks it is a good investment. He and Aunt Winnie, too, have a high opinion of that section of the country. They believe it is *the* coming wheat-growing land of the States."

Garry's mind seemed not to be absorbed by this phase of the subject. He said abruptly:

"Your folks are mighty rich, Miss Dale, aren't they?"

Dorothy started at this blunt and unusual question, but, after a moment's hesitation, decided to answer as frankly as the question had been put.

"Oh! Aunt Winnie married a wealthy man—yes," she said. "Professor Winthrop White. But we were very poor, indeed, until a few years ago when a distant relative left the major some property. Then, of course, this Hardin estate is a big thing."

"Yes," said Garry, shortly. "And you are going to be wealthy in your own right when you are of age. So your little friend told me."

"Yes," sighed Dorothy. "Tavia *will* talk. The same relative who left father his first legacy, tied up some thousands for poor little me."

Immediately Garry Knapp talked of other things. The night was fine and the moon, a silver

paring, hung low above the hills. The stars were so bright that they were reflected in the black ice under the skaters' ringing steel.

Garry and Dorothy had shot away from the others and were now well down the river toward the milldam. So perfectly had the ice frozen that when they turned the blades of the skates left long, soaplike shavings behind them.

With clasped hands, they took the stroke together perfectly. Never had Dorothy skated with a partner that suited her so well. Nor had she ever sped more swiftly over the ice.

Suddenly, she felt Garry's muscles stiffen and saw his head jerk up as he stared ahead.

"What is it?" she murmured, her own eyes so misty that she could not see clearly. Then in a moment she uttered a frightened "Oh!"

They had crossed the river, and now, on coming back, there unexpectedly appeared a long, open space before them. The water was so still that at a distance the treacherous spot looked just like the surrounding ice.

The discovery was made too late for them to stop. Indeed, Garry Knapp increased his speed, picked her up in his arms and it seemed to Dorothy that they fairly flew over the open water, landing with a resonant ring of steel upon the safe ice beyond.

For the moment that she was held tightly in the

young man's arms, she clung to him with something besides fear.

"Oh, Garry!" she gasped when he set her down again.

"Some jump, eh?" returned the young man coolly.

They skated on again without another word.

CHAPTER XXV

GARRY BALKS

THE major was ready to see Garry Knapp at nine o'clock the next morning. He was suffering one of his engagements with the enemy rheumatism, and there really was a strong reason for his having put off this interview until the shy Westerner had become somewhat settled at The Cedars as a guest.

Dorothy took Garry up to the major's room after breakfast, and they found him well-wrapped in a rug, sitting in his sun parlor which overlooked the lawns of The Cedars.

The young man from the West could not help being impressed by the fact that he was the guest of a family that was well supplied with this world's goods—one that was used to luxury as well as comfort. Is it strange that the most impressive point to him was the fact that he had no right to even *think* of trying to win Dorothy Dale?

When he had awakened that morning and looked over the luxurious furnishings of his chamber and the bathroom and dressing room connected with it, he had told himself:

"Garford Knapp, you are in wrong! This is no place for a cowpuncher from the Western plains. What little tad of money you can sell your ranch for won't put you in any such class as these folk belong to.

"And as for thinking of that girl—Great Scot! I'd make a fine figure asking any girl used to such luxury as this to come out and share a shack in Desert City or thereabout, while I punched cattle, or went to keeping store, or tried to match my wits in real estate with the sharks that exploit land out there.

"Forget it, Garford!" he advised himself, grimly. "If you can make an honest deal with this old major, make it and then clear out. This is no place for you."

He had, therefore, braced himself for the interview. The major, eyeing him keenly as he walked down the long room beside Dorothy, made his own judgment—as he always did—instantly. When Dorothy had gone he said frankly to the young man:

"Mr. Knapp, I'm glad to see you. I have heard so much about you that I feel you and I are already friends."

"Thank you, sir," said Garry, quietly, eyeing the major with as much interest as the latter eyed him.

"When my daughter was talking one day about

you and the land you had in the market adjoining the Hardin tract it struck me that perhaps it would be a good thing to buy," went on the major, briskly. "So I set our lawyers on your trail."

"So Miss Dorothy tells me, sir," the young man said.

"Now, they know all about the offer made you by those sharpers, Stiffbold & Lightly. They advised me to risk a thousand dollar option on your ranch and I telegraphed them to make you the offer."

"And you may believe I was struck all of a heap, sir," said the young man, still eyeing the major closely. "I'll tell you something: You've got me guessing."

"How's that?" asked the amused Major Dale.

"Why, people don't come around and hand me a thousand dollars every day—and just on a gamble."

"Sure I am gambling?" responded the major.

"I'm not sure of anything," admitted Garry Knapp. "But it looks like that. I accepted the certified check—I have it with me. I don't know but I'd better hand it back to you, Major, for I think you have been misinformed about the real value of the ranch. The price per acre your lawyers offer is away above the market."

"Hey!" exclaimed Major Dale. "You call yourself a business man?"

"Not much of one, I suppose," said Garry. "I'll sell you my ranch quick enough at a fair price. But this looks as if you were doing me a favor. I think you have been influenced."

"Eh?" stammered the astounded old gentleman.

"By your daughter," said Garry, quietly. "I'm conceited enough to think it is because of Miss Dale that you make me the offer you do."

"Any crime in that?" demanded the major.

"No crime exactly," rejoined Garry with one of his rare smiles, "unless I take advantage of it. But I'm not the sort of fellow, Major Dale, who can willingly accept more than I can give value for. Your offer for my ranch is beyond reason."

"Would you have thought so if another man—somebody instead of my daughter's father——" and his eyes twinkled as he said it, "had made you the offer?"

Garry Knapp was silent and showed confusion. The major went on with some grimness of expression:

"But if your conscience troubles you and you wish to call the deal off, now is your chance to return the check."

Instantly Garry pulled his wallet from his pocket and produced the folded green slip, good for a thousand dollars at the Desert City Trust Company.

"There you are, sir," he said quietly, and laid the paper upon the arm of the major's chair.

The old gentleman picked it up, identified it, and slowly tore the check into strips, eyeing the young man meanwhile.

"Then," he said, calmly, "*that* phase of the matter is closed. But you still wish to sell your ranch?"

"I do, Major Dale. But I can't accept what anybody out there would tell you was a price out of all reason."

"Except my lawyers," suggested the major.

"Well——"

"Young man, you have done a very foolish thing," said Major Dale. "A ridiculous thing, perhaps. Unless you are shrewder than you seem. My lawyers have had your land thoroughly cruised. You have the best wheat land, in embryo, anywhere in the Desert City region."

Garry started and stared at him for a minute without speaking. Then he sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

"That may be, sir. Perhaps you *do* know more about the intrinsic value of my ranch than I do myself. But I know it would cost a mint of money to develop that old rundown place into wheat soil."

"Humph! and if you had this—er—*mint* of money, what would you do?"

"Do? I'd develop it myself!" cried the young man, startled into enthusiastic speech. "I know there is a fortune there. *You* are making big profits on the Hardin place already, I understand. Cattle have gone out; but wheat has come to stay. Oh, I know all about that! But what's the use?"

"Have you tried to raise money for the development of your land?" asked the major quietly.

"I've talked to some bankers, yes. Nothing doing. The machinery and fertilizer cost at the first would be prohibitive. A couple of crop failures would wipe out everything, and the banks don't want land on their hands. As for the money-lenders—well, Major Dale, you can imagine what sort of hold *they* demand when they deal with a person in my situation."

"And you would rather have what seems to you a fair price for your land and get it off your hands?"

"I'll accept a fair price—yes. But I can't accept any favors," said the young man, his face gloomy enough but as stubborn as ever.

"I see," said the major. "Then what will you do with the money you get?"

"Try to get into some business that will make me more," and Garry looked up again with a sudden smile.

"Raising wheat does not attract you, then?"

"It's the biggest prospect in that section. I

know it has cattle raising and even mining backed clear across the board. But it's no game for a little man with little capital."

"Then why not get into it?" asked Major Dale, still speaking quietly. "You seem enthusiastic. Enthusiasm and youth—why, my boy, they will carry a fellow far!"

Garry looked at him in a rather puzzled way. "But don't I tell you, Major Dale, that the banks will not let me have money?"

"I'll let you have the money—and at a fair interest," said Major Dale.

Garry smiled slowly and put out his hand. The major quickly took it and his countenance began to brighten. But what Garry said caused the old gentleman's expression to become suddenly doleful:

"I can't accept your offer, sir. I know that it is a favor—a favor that is suggested by Miss Dorothy. If it were not for her, you would never have thought of sending for me or making either of these more than kind propositions you have made.

"I shall have to say no—and thank you."

CHAPTER XXVI

SERIOUS THOUGHTS

THE young people at The Cedars had taken Garry Knapp right into the heart of their social life. He knew he was welcome and the hospitality shown him was a most delightful experience for the young Westerner.

But "business was business." He could not see wherein he had any right to accept a favor from Major Dale because Dorothy wished her father to aid him. That was not Garry's idea of a manly part—to use the father of the girl you love as a staff in getting on in the world.

There was no conceit in Garry's belief that he had tacit permission, was it right to accept it, to try to win Dorothy Dale's heart and hand. He was just as well assured in his soul that Dorothy had been attracted to him as he was that she had gained his affection. "Love like a lightning bolt," Tavia had called Dorothy's interest in Garry Knapp. It was literally true in the young man's case. He had fallen in love with Dorothy Dale almost at first sight.

Every time he saw her during that all too brief

occasion in New York his feeling for the girl had grown. By leaps and bounds it increased until, just as Tavia had once said, if Dorothy had been in Tavia's financial situation Garry Knapp would never have left New York without first learning whether or not there was any possible chance of his winning the girl he knew he loved.

Now it was revealed to him that he had that chance—and bitterly did he regret the knowledge. For he gained it at the cost of his peace of mind.

It is one thing to long for the object forbidden us; it is quite another thing to know that we may claim that longed-for object if honor did not interfere. To Garry Knapp's mind he could not meet what was Dorothy Dale's perfectly proper advances, and keep his own self-respect.

Were he more sanguine, or a more imaginative young man, he might have done so. But Garry Knapp's head was filled with hard, practical common sense. Young men and more often young girls allow themselves to become engaged with little thought for the future. Garry was not that kind. Suppose Dorothy Dale did accept his attentions and was willing to wait for him until he could win out in some line of industrial endeavor that would afford the competence that he believed he should possess before marrying a girl used to the luxuries Dorothy was used to, Garry Knapp felt it would be wrong to accept the sacrifice.

The chances of business life, especially for a young man with the small experience and the small capital he would have, were too great. To "tie a girl up" under such circumstances was a thing Garry could not contemplate and keep his self-respect. He would not, he told himself, be led even to admit by word or look that he desired to be Dorothy's suitor.

To hide this desire during the few days he remained at The Cedars was the hardest task Garry Knapp had ever undertaken. If Dorothy was demure and modest she was likewise determined. Her happiness, she felt, was at stake and although she could but admire the attitude Garry held upon this momentous question she did not feel that he was right.

"Why, what does it matter about money—mere money?" she said one night to Tavia, confessing everything when her chum had crept into her bed with her after the lights were out. "I believe I care for money less than he does."

"You bet you do!" ejaculated Tavia, vigorously. "Just at present that young cowboy person is caring more for money than Ananias did. Money looks bigger to him than anything else in the world. With money he could have you, Doro Doodlekins—don't you see?"

"But he can have me without!" wailed Dorothy, burying her head in the pillow.

"Oh, no he can't," Tavia said wisely and quietly. "You know he can't. If you could tempt him to throw up his principles in the matter, you know very well, Doro, that you would be heartbroken."

"What?"

"Yes you would. You wouldn't want a young man dangling after you who had thrown aside his self-respect for a girl. Now, would you?" And without waiting for an answer she continued: "Not that I approve of his foolishness. Some men *are* that way, however. Thank heaven I am not a man."

"Oh! I'm glad you're not, either," confessed Dorothy with her soft lips now against Tavia's cheek.

"Thank you, ma'am. I have often thought I'd like to be of the hemale persuasion; but never, no more!" declared Tavia, with vigor. "Suppose *I* should then be afflicted with an ingrowing conscience about taking money from the woman I married? Whe-e-e-ew!"

"He wouldn't have to," murmured Dorothy, burying her head again and speaking in a muffled voice. "I'd give up the money."

"And if he had any sense or unselfishness at all he wouldn't let you do *that,*" snapped Tavia. "No. You couldn't get along without much money now, Dorothy."

"Nonsense——"

"It is the truth. I know I should be hopelessly unhappy myself if I had to go home and live again just as they do there. I have been spoiled," said Tavia, her voice growing lugubrious. "I want wealth—luxuries—and everything good that money buys. Yes, Doro, when it comes *my* time to become engaged, I must get a wealthy man or none at all. I shall be put up at auction——"

"Tavia! How you talk! Ridiculous!" exclaimed Dorothy. "You talk like a heathen."

"Am one when it comes to money matters," groaned the girl. "I have got to marry money——"

"If Nat White were as poor as a church mouse, you'd marry him in a minute!"

"Oh—er—well," sighed Tavia, "Nat is not going to ask me, I am afraid."

"He would in a minute if you'd tell him about those Lance Petterby letters."

"Don't you dare tell him, Dorothy Dale!" exclaimed Tavia, almost in fear. "You must not. Now, promise."

"I have promised," her friend said gloomily.

"And see that you stick to it. I know," said Tavia, "that I could bring Nat back to me by explaining. But there should be no need of explaining. He should know that—that—oh, well, what's the use of talking! It's all off!" and Tavia flounced around and buried her nose in the pillow.

Dorothy's wits were at work, however. In the morning she "put a flea in Ned's ear," as Tavia would have said, and Ned hurried off to the telegraph office to send a day letter to his brother. Dorothy did not censor that telegraph despatch or this section of it would never have gone over the wire:

"Come back home and take a squint at the cowboy D. has picked out for herself."

CHAPTER XXVII

"IT'S ALL OFF!"

By this time even Ned, dense as he sometimes showed himself to be, was aware of how things stood between the handsome stranger from the West and his cousin Dorothy.

Ned's heart was particularly warm at this juncture. He spent a good two hours every forenoon writing a long letter to Jennie.

"What under the sun he finds to write about gets *me*," declared Tavia. "He must indite sonnets to her eyebrows or the like. I never did believe that Ned White would fall so low as to be a poet."

"Love plays funny tricks with us," sighed Dorothy.

"Huh!" ejaculated Tavia, wide-eyed. "Do you feel like writing poetry yourself, Doro Dale? I vum!"

However, to return to Ned, when his letter writing was done he was at the beck and call of the girls or was off with Garry Knapp for the rest of the day. Toward Garry he showed the same friendliness that his mother displayed and the

major showed. They all liked the young man from Desert City; and they could not help admiring his character, although they could not believe him either wise or just to Dorothy.

The situation was delicate in the extreme. As Dorothy and Garry had never approached the subject of their secret attachment for each other, and now, of course, did not speak of it to the others, not even Ned could blunder into any opening wherein he might "out with his opinion" to the Westerner.

Garry Knapp showed nothing but the most gentlemanly regard for Dorothy. After that first evening on the ice, he did not often allow himself to be left alone in her company. He knew very well wherein his own weakness lay.

He talked frankly of his future intentions. It had been agreed between him and Major Dale that the old Knapp ranch should be turned over to the Hardin estate lawyers when Garry went back West at a price per acre that was generous, as Garry said, but not so much above the market value that he would be "ashamed to look the lawyers in the face when he took the money."

Just what Garry would do with these few thousands he did not know. His education had been a classical one. He had taken up nothing special save mineralogy, and that only because of Uncle Terry's lifelong interest in "prospects."

"I boned like a good fellow," he told Ned, "on that branch just to please the old fellow. Of course, I'd tagged along with him on a burro on many a prospecting trip when I was a kid, and had learned a lot of prospector's lore from the dear old codger.

"But what the old prospector knows about his business is a good deal like what the old-fashioned farmer knows about growing things. He does certain things because they bring results, but the old farmer doesn't know why. Just so with the old-time prospector. Uncle Terry's scientific knowledge of minerals wasn't a spoonful. I showed him things that made his eyes bug out—as we say in the West," and Garry laughed reminiscently.

"I shouldn't have thought he'd ever have quarreled with you," said Ned, having heard this fact from the girls. "You must have been helpful to him."

"That's the reef we were wrecked on," said Garry, shaking his head rather sadly.

"You don't mean it! How?" queried Ned.

"Why, I'll tell you. I don't talk of it much. Of course, you understand Uncle Terry is one of the old timers. He's lived a rough life and associated with rough men for most of it. And his slant on moral questions is not—well—er—what yours and mine would be, White."

"I see," said Ned, nodding. "You collided on a matter of ethics?"

"As you might say," admitted Garry. "There are abandoned diggings all over the West, especially where gold was found in rich deposits that can now be dug over and, by scientific methods, made to yield comfortable fortunes.

"Why, in the early rush the metal, silver, was not thought of! The miners cursed the black stuff which got in their way and later proved to be almost pure silver ore. Other valuable metals were neglected, too. The miners could see nothing but yellow. They were gold crazy."

"I see," Ned agreed. "It must have been great times out there in those early days."

"Ha!" exclaimed Garry. "For every ounce of gold mined in the old times there was a man wasted. The early gold mining cost more in men than a war, believe me! However, that isn't the point, or what I was telling you about.

"Some time after I left the university Uncle Terry wanted me to go off on a prospecting trip with him and I went—just for the holiday, you understand. These last few years he hasn't made a strike. He has plenty of money, anyway; but the wanderlust of the old prospector seizes him and he just has to pack up and go.

"We struck Seeper's Gulch. It was some strike in its day, about thirty years ago. The gold hunt-

ers dug fortunes out of that gulch, and then the Chinese came in and raked over and sifted the refuse. You'd think there wasn't ten cents worth of valuable metal left in that place, wouldn't you?"

Ned nodded, keenly interested in the story.

"Well, that's what the old man thought. He made all kinds of jokes over a squatter's family that had picketed there and were digging and toiling over the played out claims.

"It seemed that they held legal title to a big patch of the gulch. Some sharper had sawed off the claim on them for good, hard-earned money; and here they were, broke and desperate. Why! there hadn't been any gold mined there for years and years, and their title, although perfectly legal, wasn't worth a cent—or so it seemed.

"Uncle Terry tried to show them that. They were stubborn. They had to be, you see," said Garry, shaking his head. "Every hope they had in the world was right in that God-forsaken gulch.

"Well," he sighed, "I got to mooning around, impatient to be gone, and I found something. It was so plain that I wonder I didn't fall over it and break my neck," and Garry laughed.

"What was it? Not gold?"

"No. Copper. And a good, healthy lead of it. I traced the vein some distance before I would believe it myself. And the bulk of it seemed to lie

right inside the boundaries of that supposedly worthless claim those poor people had bought.

"I didn't dare tell anybody at first. I had to figure out how she could be mined (for copper mining isn't like washing gold dust) and how the ore could be taken to the crusher. The old roads were pretty good, I found. It wouldn't be much of a haul from Seeper's Gulch to town.

"Then I told Uncle Terry—and showed him."

Ned waited, looking at Garry curiously.

"That—that's where he and I locked horns," sighed Garry. "Uncle Terry was for offering to buy the claim for a hundred dollars. He had that much in his jeans and the squatters were desperate —meat and meal all out and not enough gold in the bottom of the pans to color a finger-ring."

He was silent again for a moment, and then continued:

"I couldn't see it. To take advantage of the ignorance of that poor family wasn't a square deal. Uncle Terry lost his head and then lost his temper. To stop him from making any such deal I out with my story and showed those folks just where they stood. A little money would start 'em, and I lent them that——"

"But your Uncle Terry?" asked Ned, curiously.

"Oh, he went off mad. I saw the squatters started right and then made for home. I was some time getting there——"

"You cleaned yourself out helping the owners of the claim?" put in Ned, shrewdly.

"Why—yes, I did. But that was nothing. I'd been broke before. I got a job here and there to carry me along. But when I reached home Uncle Terry had hiked out for Alaska and left a letter with a lawyer for me. I was the one bad egg in the family," and Garry laughed rather ruefully, "so he said. He'd rather give his money to build a rattlesnake home than to me. So that's where we stand to-day. And you see, White, I did not exactly prepare myself for any profession or any business, depending as I was on Uncle Terry's bounty."

"Tough luck," announced Ned White.

"It was very foolish on my part. No man should look forward to another's shoes. If I had gone ahead with the understanding that I had my own row to hoe when I got through school, believe me, I should have picked my line long before I left the university and prepared accordingly.

"I figure that I'm set back several years. With this little bunch of money your uncle is going to pay me for my old ranch I have got to get into something that will begin to turn me a penny at once. Not so easy to do, Mr. White."

"But what about the folks you steered into the copper mine?" asked Ned.

"Oh, they are making out fairly well. It was

no great fortune, but a good paying proposition and may keep going for years. Copper is away up now, you know. They paid me back the loan long ago. But poor old Uncle Terry—well, he is still sore, and I guess he will remain so for the remainder of his natural. I'm sorry for him."

"And not for yourself?" asked Ned, slyly.

"Why, I'd be glad if he'd back me in something. Developing my ranch into wheat land, for instance. Money lies that way, I believe. But it takes two or three years to get going and lots of money for machinery. Can't raise wheat out there in a small way. It means tractors, and gangplows and all such things. Whew! no use thinking of that now," and Garry heaved a final sigh.

He had not asked Ned to keep the tale to himself; therefore, the family knew the particulars of Garry Knapp's trouble with his uncle in a short time. It was the one thing needed to make Major Dale, at least, desire to keep in touch with the young Westerner.

"I'm not surprised that he looks upon any understanding with Dorothy in the way he does," the major said to Aunt Winnie. "He is a high-minded fellow—no doubt of it. And I believe he is no namby-pamby. He will go far before he gets through. I'll prophesy that."

"But, my dear Major," said his sister, with a rather tremulous smile, "it may be years before

such an honorable young man as Garry Knapp will acquire a competence sufficient to encourage him to come after our Dorothy."

"Well—er——"

"And they need each other *now*," went on Mrs. Mrs. White, with assurance, "while they are young and can get the good of youth and of life itself. Not after their hearts are starved by long and impatient waiting."

"Oh, the young idiot!" growled the major, shaking his head.

Aunt Winnie laughed, although there was still a tremor in her voice. "You call him high-minded and an idiot——"

"He is both," growled Major Dale. "Perhaps, to be cynical, one might say that in this day and generation the two attributes go together! I—I wish I knew the way out."

"So do I," sighed Mrs. White. "For Dorothy's sake," she added.

"For both their sakes," said the major. "For, believe me, this young man isn't having a very good time, either."

Tavia wished she might "cut the Gordian knot," as she expressed it. Ned would have gladly shown Garry a way out of the difficulty. And Dorothy Dale could do nothing!

"What helpless folk we girls are, after all," she confessed to Tavia. "I thought I was being so

bold, so brave, in getting Garry to come East. I believed I had solved the problem through father's aid. And look at it now! No farther toward what I want than before."

"Garry Knapp is a—a chump!" exclaimed Tavia, with some heat.

"But a very lovable chump," added Dorothy, smiling patiently. "Oh, dear! It must be his decision, not mine, after all. I tell you, even the most modern of girls are helpless in the end. The man decides."

Nat came back to North Birchland in haste. It needed only a word—even from his brother—to bring him. Perhaps he would have met Tavia as though no misunderstanding had arisen between them had she been willing to ignore their difficulty.

But when he kissed Dorothy and his mother, and turned to Tavia, she put out her hand and looked Nat sternly in the eye. He knew better than to make a joke of his welcome home with her. She had raised the barrier herself and she meant to keep it up.

"The next time you kiss me it must be in solemn earnest."

She had said that to Nat and she proposed to abide by it. The old, cordial, happy-go-lucky comradeship could never be renewed. Nat realized that suddenly and dropped his head as he went indoors with his bag.

He had returned almost too late to meet Garry Knapp after all. The Westerner laughingly protested that he had loafed long enough. He had to run down to New York for a day or so to attend to some business for Bob Douglas and then must start West.

"Come back here before you really start for the 'wild and woolly,' " begged Ned. "We'll get up a real house party——"

"Tempt me not!" cried Garry, with hand raised. "It is hard enough for me to pull my freight now. If I came again I'd only have to—well! it would be harder, that's all," and his usually hopeful face was overcast.

"Remember you leave friends here, my boy," said the major, when he saw the young man alone the evening before his departure. "You'll find no friends anywhere who will be more interested in your success than these at The Cedars."

"I believe you, Major. I wish I could show my appreciation of your kindness in a greater degree by accepting your offer to help me. But I can't do it. It wouldn't be right."

"No. From your standpoint, I suppose it wouldn't," admitted the major, with a sigh. "But at least you'll correspond——"

"Ned and I are going to write each other frequently—we've got quite chummy, you know," and Garry laughed. "You shall all hear of me.

And thank you a thousand times for your interest, Major Dale!"

"But my interest hasn't accomplished what I wanted it to accomplish," muttered the old gentleman, as Garry turned away.

Dorothy showed a brave face when the time came for Garry's departure. She did not make an occasion for seeing him alone, as she might easily have done. Somehow she felt bound in honor—in Garry's honor—not to try to break down his decision. She knew he understood her; and she understood Garry. Why make the parting harder by any talk about it?

But Tavia's observation as Garry was whirled away by Ned in the car for the railway station, sounded like a knell in Dorothy Dale's ears.

"It's all off!" remarked Tavia.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CASTAWAYS

DRIFTS covered the fences and fitted every evergreen about The Cedars with a white cap. The snow had come quite unexpectedly and in the arms of a blizzard.

For two days and nights the storm had raged all over the East. Wires were down and many railroad trains were blocked. New York City was reported snowbound.

"I bet old Garry is holed up in the hotel there all right," said Ned. "He'd never have got away before the storm."

Dorothy hoped Garry had not started for the West and had become snowbound in some train; but she said nothing about it.

It took two full days for the roads to be broken around North Birchland. And then, of course, to use an automobile was quite impossible.

The Dale boys were naturally delighted, for there was no school for several days and snow-caves, snowmen and snow monuments of all kind were constructed all over the White lawns.

Nor were Joe and Roger alone in these out-of-

door activities. The girls, as well as Ned and Nat, lent their assistance, and Tavia proved to be a fine snow sculptor.

"Always was. Believe I might learn to work putty and finally become a great sculptor," she declared. "At Glenwood they said I had a talent for composition."

"What kind of figure do you prefer to sculp, Tavia?" asked Ned, with curiosity.

"Oh, I think I should just *love* a job in an ice-cream factory, turning out works of art for parties and banquets. Or making little figures on New Year's and birthday cakes. And then—think of all the nice 'eats'!"

"Oh! I'd like to do that," breathed Roger, with round eyes.

"Now, see," laughed Dorothy, "you have started Roger, perhaps, in a career. He does love ice-cream and cake."

At least the joke started something else if it did not point Roger on the road to fame as an "ice-cream sculptor." The boy was inordinately fond of goodies and Tavia promised him a treat just as soon as ever she could get into town.

A few days before Tavia had been the recipient of a sum of money from home. When he had any money himself Mr. Travers never forgot his pretty daughter's need. He was doing very well in business now, as well as holding a political po-

sition that paid a good salary. This money she had received was of course burning a hole in Tavia's pocket. She must needs get into town as soon as the roads were passable, to buy goodies as her contract with Roger called for.

The horses had not been out of the stable for a week and the coachman admitted they needed exercise. So he was to drive Tavia to town directly after breakfast. It was washday, however, and something had happened to the furnace in the laundry. The coachman was general handy man about the White premises, and he was called upon to fix the furnace just as Tavia—and the horses—were ready.

"But who'll drive me?" asked Tavia, looking askance at the spirited span that the boy from the stables was holding. "Goodness! aren't they full of ginger?"

"Better wait till afternoon," advised Dorothy.

"But they are all ready, and so am I. Besides," said Tavia with a glance at Roger's doleful face, "somebody smells disappointment."

Roger understood and said, trying to speak gruffly:

"Oh, I don't mind."

"No. I see you don't," Tavia returned dryly, and just then Nat appeared on the porch in bearskin and driving gloves.

"Get in, Tavia, if you want to go. The horses

need the work, anyway; and the coachman may be all day at that furnace."

"Oh—I—ah——" began Tavia. Then she closed her lips and marched down the steps and got into the cutter. Whatever her feeling about the matter, she was not going to attract everybody's attention by backing out.

Nat tucked the robes around her and got in himself. Then he gathered up the reins, the boy sprang out of the way, and they were off.

With the runners of the light sleigh humming at their heels the horses gathered speed each moment. Nat hung on to the reins and the roses began to blow in Tavia's cheeks and the fire of excitement burn in her eyes.

How she loved to travel fast! And in riding beside Nat the pleasure of speed for her was always doubled. Whether it was in the automobile, or behind the galloping blacks, as now, to speed along the highways by Nat's side was a delight.

The snow was packed just right for sleighing and the wildly excited span tore into town at racing speed. Indeed, so excited were the horses that Nat thought it better not to stop anywhere until the creatures had got over their first desire to run.

So they swept through the town and out upon the road to The Beeches.

"Don't mind, do you?" Nat stammered, casting a quick, sidelong glance at Tavia.

"Oh, Nat! it's wonderful!" she gasped, but looked straight ahead.

"Good little sport—the best ever!" groaned Nat; but perhaps she did not hear the compliment thus wrested from him.

He turned into the upper road for The Beeches, believing it would be more traveled than the other highway. In this, however, he was proved mistaken in a very few minutes. The road breakers had not been far on this highway, so the blacks were soon floundering through the drifts and were rapidly brought down to a sensible pace.

"Say! this is altogether too rough," Nat declared. "It's no fun being tossed about like beans in a sack. I'd better turn 'em around."

"You'll tip us over, Nat," objected Tavia.

"Likely to," admitted the young man. "So we'd better both hop out while I perform the necessary operation."

"Maybe they will get away from you," she cried with some fear. "Be careful."

"Watch your Uncle Nat," he returned lightly. "I'll not let them get away."

Tavia was the last person to be cautious; so she hopped out into the snow on her side of the sleigh while Nat alighted on the other. A sharp pull on the bits and the blacks were plunging in

the drift to one side of the half beaten track. Tavia stepped well back out of the way.

The horses breasted the deep snow, snorting and tossing their heads. Their spirits were not quenched even after this long and hard dash from The Cedars.

The sleigh did go over on its side; but Nat righted it quickly. This, however, necessitated his letting go of the reins with one hand.

The next moment the sleigh came with a terrific shock into collision with an obstruction. It was a log beside the road, completely hidden in the snow.

Frightened, the horses plunged and kicked. The doubletree snapped and the reins were jerked from Nat's grasp. The horses leaped ahead, squealing and plunging, tearing the harness completely from their backs. The sleigh remained wedged behind the log; but the animals were freed and tore away along the road, back toward North Birchland.

Tavia had made no outcry; but now, in the midst of the snow cloud that had been kicked up, she saw that Nat was floundering in the drift.

"Oh, Nat! are you hurt?" she moaned, and ran to him.

But he was already gingerly getting upon his feet. He had lost his cap, and the neck of his coat, where the big collar flared away, was packed with snow.

"Badly hurt—in my dignity," he growled. "Oh gee, Tavia! Come and scoop some of this snow out of my neck."

She giggled at that. She could not help it, for he looked really funny. Nevertheless she lent him some practical aid, and after he had shaken himself out of the loose snow and found his cap, he could grin himself at the situation.

"We're castaway in the snow, just the same, old girl," he said. "What'll we do—start back and go through North Birchland, the beheld of all beholders, or take the crossroad back to The Cedars—and so save a couple of miles?"

"Oh, let's go home the quickest way," she said. "I—I don't want to be the laughing stock for the whole town."

"My fault, Tavia. I'm sorry," he said ruefully.

"No more your fault than it was mine," she said loyally.

"Oh, yes it was," he groaned, looking at her seriously. "And it always *is* my fault."

"What is always your fault?" she asked him but tremulously and stepping back a little.

"Our scraps, Tavia. Our big scrap. I *know* I ought not to have questioned you about that old letter. Oh, hang it, Tavia! don't you see just how sorry and ashamed I am?" he cried boyishly, putting out both gloved hands to her.

"I—I know this isn't just the way to tell you—or the place. But my heart just *aches* because of that scrap, Tavia. I don't care how many letters you have from other people. I know there's nothing out of the way in them. I was just jealous—and—and mean——"

"Anybody tell you why Lance Petterby was writing to me?" put in Tavia sternly.

"No. Of course not. *Hang* Lance Petterby, anyway——"

"Oh, that would be too bad. His wife would feel dreadfully if Lance were hung."

"*What!*"

"I knew you were still jealous of poor Lance," Tavia shot in, wagging her head. "And that word proves it."

"I don't care. I said what I meant before I knew he was married. *Is* he?" gasped Nat.

"Very much so. They've got a baby girl and I'm its godmother. Octavia Susan Petterby."

"Tavia!" Nat whispered still holding out his hands. "Do—do you forgive me?"

"Now! is this a time or a place to talk things over?" she demanded apparently inclined to keep up the wall. "We are castaway in the snow. Bo-o-ooh! we're likely to freeze here——"

"I don't care if I do freeze," he declared recklessly. "You've got to answer me here and now, Tavia."

"Have I?" with a toss of her head. "Who are *you* to command *me,* I'd like to know?" Then with sudden seriousness and a flood of crimson in her face that fairly glorified Tavia Travers: "How about that request I told you your mother must make Nat? I meant it."

"See here! See here!" cried the young man, tearing off his gloves and dashing them into the snow while he struggled to open his bearskin coat and then the coat beneath.

From an inner pocket he drew forth a letter and opened it so she could read.

"See!" Nat cried. "It's from mother. She wrote it to me while I was in Boston—before old Ned's telegram came. See what she says here—second paragraph, Tavia."

The girl read the words with a little intake of her breath:

"And, my dear boy, I know that you have quarreled in some way and for some reason with our pretty, impetuous Tavia. Do not risk your own happiness and hers, Nathaniel, through any stubbornness. Tavia is worth breaking one's pride for. She is the girl I hope to see you marry—nobody else in this wide world could so satisfy me as your wife."

That was as far as Tavia could read, for her

eyes were misty. She hung her head like a child and whispered, as Nat approached:

"Oh, Nat! Nat! how I doubted her! She is *so* good!"

He put his arms about her, and she snuggled up against the bearskin coat.

"Say! how about *me?*" he demanded huskily. "Now that the Widder White has asked you to be her daughter-in-law, don't I come into the picture at all?"

Tavia raised her head, looked at him searchingly, and suddenly laid her lips against his eager ones.

"You're—you're the *whole* picture for me, Nat!" she breathed.

CHAPTER XXIX

SOMETHING AMAZING

Now that Garry Knapp had left The Cedars—had passed out of her life forever perhaps—Dorothy Dale found herself in a much disturbed state of mind. She did not wish to sit and think over her situation. If she did she knew she would break down.

She was tempted—oh! sorely tempted—to write Garry Knapp all that was in her heart. Her cheeks burned when she thought of doing such a thing; yet, after all, she was fighting for happiness and as she saw it receding from her she grew desperate.

But Dorothy Dale had gone as far as she could. She had done her best to bring the man she loved into line with her own thought. She had the satisfaction of believing he felt toward her as she did toward him. But there matters stood; she could do no more. She did not let her mind dwell upon this state of affairs; she could not and retain that calm expected of Dorothy Dale by the rest of the family at The Cedars. It is what is expected of us that we accomplish, after all. She had never

been in the habit of giving away to her feelings, even as a schoolgirl. Much more was expected of her now.

The older people about her were, of course, sympathetic. She would have been glad to get away from them for that very reason. Whenever Tavia looked at her Dorothy saw commiseration in her eyes. So, too, with Aunt Winnie and the major. Dorothy turned with relief to her brothers who had not much thought for anything but fun and frolic.

Joe and Roger had quite fallen in love with Garry Knapp and talked a good deal about him. But their talk was innocent enough and was not aimed at her. They had not discovered—as they had regarding Jennie Hapgood and Ned—that their big sister was in the toils of this strange new disease that seemed to have smitten the young folk at The Cedars.

On this very day that Tavia had elected to go to town and Nat had driven her in the cutter, Dorothy put on her wraps for a tramp through the snow. As she started toward the back road she saw Joe and Roger coming away from the kitchen door, having been whisked out by the cook.

"Take it all and go and don't youse boys be botherin' me again to-day—and everything behind because of the wash," cried Mary, as the boys departed.

"What have you been bothering Mary for?" asked Dorothy, hailing her brothers.

"Suet," said Joe.

"Oh, do come on, Sister," cried the eager Roger. "We're going to feed 'em."

"Feed what?" asked Dorothy.

"The bluejays and the clapes and the snow buntings," Roger declared.

"With suet?"

"That's for the jays," explained Joe. "We've got plenty of cracked corn and oats for the little birds. You see, we tie the chunks of suet up in the trees—and you ought to see the bluejays come after it!"

"Do come with us," begged Roger again, who always found a double pleasure in having Dorothy attend them on any venture.

"I don't know. You boys have grown so you can keep ahead of me," laughed Dorothy. "Where are you going—how far?"

"Up to Snake Hill—there by the gully. Mr. Garry Knapp showed us last week," Joe said. "He says he always feeds the birds in the winter time out where he lives."

Dorothy smiled and nodded. "I should presume he did," she said. "He is that kind—isn't he, boys?"

"He's bully," said Roger, with enthusiasm.

"*What* kind?" asked Joe, with some caution.

"Just kind," laughed Dorothy. "Kind to everybody and everything. Birds and all," she said. But to herself she thought: "Kind to everybody but poor little me!"

However, she went on with her brothers. They plowed through the drifts in the back road, but found the going not as hard as in the woods. The tramp to the edge of the gully into which the boys had come so near to plunging on their sled weeks before, was quite exhausting.

This distant spot had been selected because of the number of birds that always were to be found here, winter or summer. The undergrowth was thick and the berries and seeds tempted many of the songsters and bright-plumaged birds to remain beyond the usual season for migration.

Then it would be too late for them to fly South had they so desired. Now, with the heavy snow heaped upon everything edible, the feathered creatures were going to have a time of famine if they were not thought of by their human neighbors.

Sparrows and chicadees are friendly little things and will keep close to human habitations in winter; but the bluejay, that saucy rascal, is always shy. He and his wilder brothers must be fed in the woods.

There were the tracks of the birds—thousands and thousands of tracks about the gully. Roger began to throw out the grain, scattering it care-

fully on the snowcrust, while Joe climbed up the first tree with a lump of suet tied to a cord.

"I got to tie it high," he told Dorothy, who asked him, "'cause otherwise, Mr. Knapp says, dogs or foxes, or such like, will get it instead of the birds."

"Oh, I see," Dorothy said. "Look where you step, Roger. See! the gully is level full of snow. What a drift!"

This was true. The snow lay in the hollow from twenty to thirty feet in depth. None of the Dales could remember seeing so much snow before.

Dorothy held the other pieces of suet for Joe while he climbed the second tree. It was during this process that she suddenly missed Roger. She could not hear him nor see him.

"Roger!" she called.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Joe tartly. "You're scaring the birds."

"But Roger is scaring *me*," his sister told him. "Look, Joe, from where you are. Can you see him? Is he hiding from us?"

Joe gave a glance around; then he hastened to descend the tree.

"What is it?" asked Dorothy worriedly. "What has happened to him?"

Joe said never a word, but hastened along the bank of the gully. They could scarcely distinguish the line of the bank in some places and right at

the very steepest part was a wallow in the snow. Something had sunk down there and the snow had caved in after it!

"Roger!" gasped Dorothy, her heart beating fast and the muscles of her throat tightening.

"Oh, cricky!" groaned Joe. "He's gone down."

It was the steepest and deepest part of the gully. Not a sound came up from the huge drift into which the smaller boy had evidently tumbled—no answer to their cries.

* * * * * * *

Dorothy and her brothers had scarcely gone out of sight of the house when Major Dale, looking from the broad front window of his room, beheld a figure plowing through the heaped up snow and in at the gateway of The Cedars. It was not Nat and it was not Ned; at first he did not recognize the man approaching the front door at all.

Then he suddenly uttered a shout which brought the housemaid from her dusting in the hall.

"Major Dale! what is it, please? Can I do anything for you?" asked the girl, her hand upon her heart.

"Great glory! did I scare you, Mina?" he demanded. "Well! I'm pretty near scared myself. Leastways, I am amazed. Run down and open the door for Mr. Knapp—and bring him right up here."

"Mr. Knapp!" cried the maid, and was away

on swift feet, for Garry had endeared himself to the serving people as well as to the family during his brief stay at The Cedars.

The young man threw aside his outer clothing in haste and ran upstairs to the major's room. Dorothy's father had got up in his excitement and was waiting for him with eager eyes.

"Garry! Garry Knapp!" he exclaimed. "What has happened? What has brought you back here, my dear boy?"

Garry was smiling, but it was a grave smile. Indeed, something dwelt in the young man's eyes that the major had never seen before.

"What is it?" repeated the old gentleman, as he seized Garry's hand.

"Major, I've come to ask a favor," blurted out the Westerner.

"A favor—and at last?" cried Major Dale. "It is granted."

"Wait till you hear what it is—all of it. First I want you to call our bargain off."

"What? You don't want to sell your ranch?" gasped the major.

"No, sir. Things have—well, have changed a bit. My ranch is something that I must not sell, for I can see a way now to work it myself."

"You can, my boy? You can develop it? Then the bargain's off!" cried the major. "I only want to see you successful."

"Thank you, sir. You are more than kind—kinder than I have any reason to expect. And I presume you think me a fellow of fluctuating intentions, eh?" and he laughed shortly.

"I am waiting to hear about that, Garry," said the major, eyeing him intently.

With a thrill in his voice that meant joy, yet with eyes that were frankly bedimmed with tears, Garry Knapp put a paper into Major Dale's hand, saying:

"Read that, Major,—read that and tell me what you think of it."

CHAPTER XXX

SO IT WAS ALL SETTLED

"WHAT's this—what's this, my boy?" cried the major hastily adjusting his reading glasses. "A telegram? And from the West, eh?"

"A night letter from Bob Douglas. I got it yesterday morning. I've been all this time getting here, Major. Believe me! the railroads are badly blocked."

Major Dale was reading the telegram. His face flushed and his eyes brightened as he read.

"This is authentic, Garry?" he finally asked, with shaking voice.

"Sure. I know Bob Douglas—and Gibson, the lawyer, too. Gibson has been in touch with the poor old man all the time. I expect Uncle Terry must have left the will and all his papers with Gibson when he hiked out for Alaska. Poor, poor old man! He's gone without my ever having seen him again." Garry's voice was broken and he turned to look out of the window.

"Not your fault, my boy," said the major, clearing his throat.

"No, sir. But my misfortune. I know now that

the old man loved me or he would not have made me rich in the end."

Major Dale was reading the long telegram again. "Your friend, Mr. Douglas, repeats a phrase of the will, it is evident," he said softly. "Your uncle says you are to have his money 'because you are too honest to ever make any for yourself.' Do you believe that, Garry?" and his eyes suddenly twinkled.

Garry Knapp blushed and shook his head negatively. "That's just the old man's caustic wit," he said. "I'll make good all right. I've got the land, and now I've got the money to develop it——"

"Major Dale! Where is Miss Dorothy?"

"Gone out for a tramp in the snow. I heard her with the boys," said the major, smiling. "I —I expect, Garry, you wish to tell her the good news?"

"And something else, Major, if you will permit me."

The old gentleman looked at him searchingly. "I am not altogether sure that you deserve to get her, Garry. You are a laggard in love," he said. "But you have my best wishes."

"You'll not find me slow that way after *this!*" exclaimed Garry Knapp gaily, as he made for the door.

Thus it was that, having traced Dorothy and

her brothers from the house, the young Westerner came upon the site of the accident to Roger just as the girl and Joe discovered the disappearance of the smaller boy in the deep drift.

"Run for help, Joe!" Dorothy was crying. "Bring somebody! And ropes! No! don't you dare jump into that drift! Then there will be two of you lost. Oh!"

"Hooray!" yelled Joe at that instant. "Here's Mr. Knapp!"

Dorothy could not understand Garry's appearance; but she had to believe her eyesight. Before the young man, approaching now by great leaps, had reached the spot they had explained the trouble to him.

"Don't be so frightened, Dorothy," he cried. "The boy won't smother in that snowdrift. He's probably so scared that——"

Just then a muffled cry came to their ears from below in the drifted gulch.

"He isn't dead then!" declared Joe. "How're we going to get him out, Mr. Knapp?"

"By you and Miss Dorothy standing back out of danger and letting me burrow there," said Garry.

He had already thrown aside his coat. Now he leaped well out from the edge of the gully bank, turning in the air so as to face them as he plunged, feet first, into the drift.

It was partially hollowed out underneath—and this fact Garry had surmised. The wind had blown the snow into the gully, but a hovering wreath of the frozen element had tempted Roger upon its surface and then treacherously let him down into the heart of it.

Garry plunged through and almost landed upon the frightened boy. He groped for him, picked him up in his arms, and the next minute Roger's head and shoulders burst through the snow crust and he was tossed by Garry out upon the bank.

"Oh, Garry!" gasped Dorothy, trying to help the man up the bank and out of the snow wreath. "What ever should we have done without you?"

"I don't see what you're going to do without me, anyway," laughed the young man breathlessly, finally recovering his feet.

"Garry!"

She looked at him almost in fear, gazing into his flushed face. She saw that something had happened—something that had changed his attitude toward her; but she could not guess what it was.

The boys were laughing, and Joe was beating the snow off the clothing of his younger brother. They did not notice their elders for the moment.

"How——Why did you come back, Garry?" the girl asked directly.

"I come back to see if you would let such a blundering fellow as I am tell you what is in his

heart," Garry said softly, looking at her with serious gaze.

"Garry! What has happened?" she murmured.

He told her quietly, but with a break in his voice that betrayed the depth of his feeling for his Uncle Terry. "The poor old boy!" he said. "If he had only showed me he loved me so while he lived—and given me a chance to show him."

"It is not your fault," said Dorothy using the words her father had used in commenting upon the matter.

They were standing close together—there in the snow, and his arms were about her. Dorothy looked up bravely into his face.

"I—I guess I can't say it very well, Dorothy. But you know how I feel—how much I love you, my dear. I'm going to make good out there on the old ranch, and then I want to come back here for you. Will you wait for me, Dorothy?"

"I expected to have to wait much longer than that, Garry," Dorothy replied with a tremulous sigh. And then as he drew her still closer she hid her face on his bosom.

"Lookut! Lookut!" cried Roger in the background, suddenly observing the tableau. "What do you know about Dorothy and Garry Knapp doing it too?"

"Gee!" growled Joe, in disgust. "It must be

catching. Tavia and old Nat will get it. Come on away, Roger. Huh! they don't even know we're on earth."

And it was some time before Dorothy Dale and "that cowboy person" awoke to the fact that they were alone and it was a much longer time still before they started back for The Cedars, hand in hand.

THE END.

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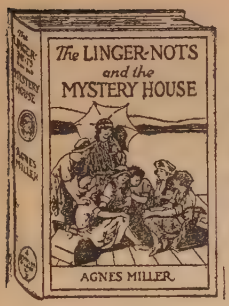

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